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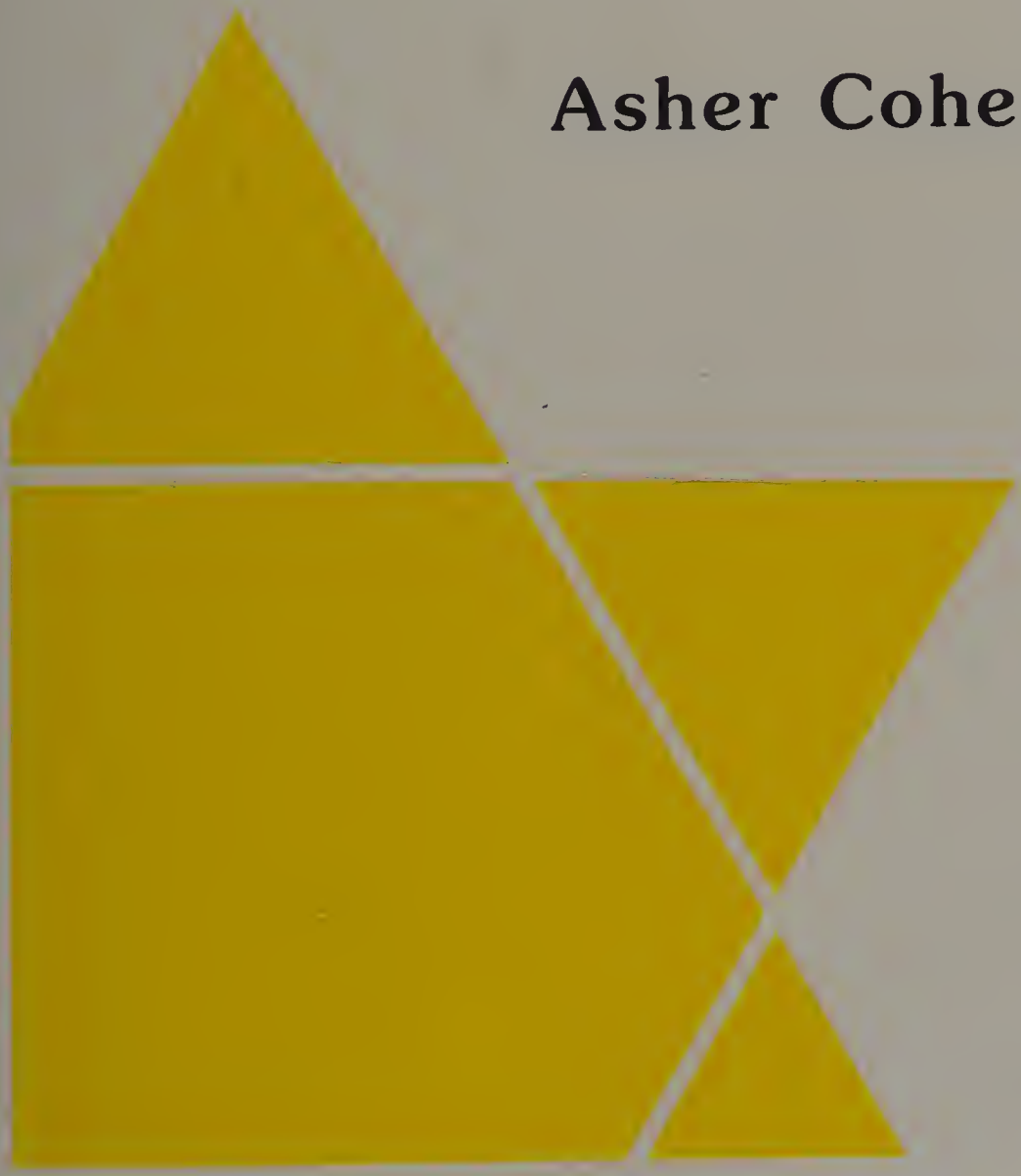
THE HALUTZ RESISTANCE IN HUNGARY 1942-1944

Asher Cohen



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The Halutz Resistance in Hungary 1942-1944

ASHER COHEN

Translated from the Hebrew by
CARL ALPERT

SOCIAL SCIENCE MONOGRAPHS, BOULDER
and
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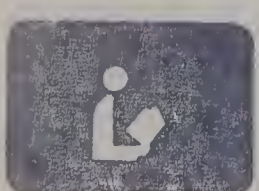

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Holocaust Studies Series

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The first three books in the Series were published by Kluwer-Nijhoff Publishing of Boston.

Dedicated to my parents,
Margit and György Kohn

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PREFACE

No other event in world history elicited so many literary, artistic, and scholarly works in so short a period as the Holocaust. Much of this outpouring was impelled by the desire to bear witness to this most awesome event in the history of not only the Jewish people, but the Christian world as well. The primary concern of most of these works have been the three major *dramatis personae* of the Holocaust era: the perpetrators, the victims, and the onlookers. Comparatively little has been written about those who actively defied the perpetrators, risking their lives in the uneven struggle for the rescue of the remnant of the Jewish people. The bulk of the belletristic and scholarly works on this subject deal with the uprisings in various ghettos and camps in Poland, above all the heroic revolt of the Warsaw Ghetto. Except for some relatively brief descriptions in scholarly works, very little of substance has until recently appeared about the Jewish resistance in Hungary. This void was first filled in 1984, when Dr. Asher Cohen of the University of Haifa published his well-documented study—*The Halutz Resistance in Hungary*—in Hebrew. Awarded the Gutman Prize of *Massua* (Israel-1984), Dr. Cohen's work represents a major contribution to the history of Jewish resistance during the Second World War. The Institute for Holocaust Studies of the Graduate School and University Center of The City University of New York is proud to make it accessible to the English-speaking world as part of its Holocaust Studies Series.

Randolph L. Braham
Series Editor

INTRODUCTION

Two authors have written comprehensive works on the history of the Jews of Hungary during the Holocaust. With regard to the *Halutz* (pioneer) Resistance movement in Hungary, Jenő Lévai wrote in his book, published in 1946:

> Jewish youth, boys and girls with an enterprising spirit, risked their lives in an effort to rescue fellow Jews—and in many cases with marked success. Particularly the Zionist youth worked in organized fashion, although in many instances young people who have previously never identified themselves with a common Jewish destiny also participated in these activities. These young heroes and heroines are deserving of public recognition, each one by name, as the tales of their achievements are recounted. Through no fault of our own, this is not being done in the present volume. The time will yet come when the fully story will be told.[1]

Despite this tribute, Lévai never returned to the subject of the activities of the Jewish Resistance in any of his eight books dealing with Hungarian Jewry during the Holocaust. Thirty-five years later, in 1981, Randolph L. Braham wrote the following: (Parentheses in the original.)

> The members of the young Zionist pioneers (and there were only a few hundred of them) took militant action for the rescuing of Jews. By doing so they were responsible for what were by far the shiniest

> hours in the tragic wartime history of Hungarian Jewry. They never engaged in open combat and they failed to sabotage any of the many rail lines leading to Auschwitz (they did not have this kind of power), but their heroic rescue operations can clearly be classified as acts of resistance.[2]

In his comprehensive and extremely well-documented and detailed work, even Braham devotes no more than a few pages to a part of the Resistance activities, and these primarily at the end of the period.

There is a serious lack not only of a scientific study, but also of any memoirs. Only in recent years have two books appeared, composed principally of personal evidence, those of Rafi Benshalom and Zvi Goldfarb, former leaders of the Halutz Resistance. Both volumes were published in Israel, in Hebrew.[3]

A very clear trend is discernible in the historical research published in Hungary since 1949. There is no attempt to conceal the responsibility of the Hungarian people for the annihilation of close to 600,000 Jews, but every anti-Nazi action or effort which was not directed by the Communist Party is systematically minimized or even ignored. No activity or enterprise by any Zionist body is mentioned in any of these books.[4]

The result has been a practically complete suppression of the story for 40 years, both in research and, to an extent, even among those who themselves played a leading role in the Resistance. An attempt to explain this unique phenomenon must lead to a review of the history of the Resistance, as well as to fundamental questions regarding the current generation's comprehension of the history of the Holocaust in general, and the nature of the Jewish Resistance in particular.

The Halutz Resistance in Hungary began with the arrival and absorption of some dozens of young Slovakian refugees in the spring of 1942, and reached its peak in a large-scale rescue of thousands of Jews with scarcely any face to face battle with the enemy.

When the war ended, most of the members of the Resistance were between the ages of 18 and 22, too young to make any all-inclusive assessment of the significance of their actions and the importance of their organization. The liberation of the Jews of Budapest in January 1945 found these young people in the midst of a frantic attempt to establish a Zionist movement of a scope hitherto unknown in Hungary. They were

engaged in organizing "illegal" immigration to Palestine and establishing Israel's independence—activities which no doubt eclipsed the events of the Resistance. It was only many years later that they began to recall their own historic chapter.

The other important reason why the story of the Halutz Resistance in Hungary has been "forgotten" is the interpretation given at the end of the 1940s, by the *Yishuv* (the organized Jewish community in Palestine) to the events of the Holocaust in general and the armed resistance in particular. Most of the activists of the Hungarian Jewish Resistance went to Israel upon proclamation of the state or immediately thereafter. Upon their arrival they were frequently greeted with the stereotyped question: "Why didn't you fight back, the way the Halutzim did in Warsaw?"

These young people suddenly felt that they had disappointed the expectations of the *Yishuv*. Since the Resistance in Hungary had not engaged in pitched battles with the Germans and had not blown up railroads, what was there to talk about? About saving the lives of a few thousand Jews? Even before the present research, a group of former leaders in the Resistance devoted many hours to setting down their collective testimony, and a large part of this evidence is given over to apologetic explanations why the Resistance did not engage in open revolt.[5] The "Warsaw complex" still hung heavy over them, even at the beginning of the 1970s.

On the premise that no longer requires confirmation, that to the Nazis the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" meant the annihilation of every Jew under their rule, those deeds which saved lives must be seen as the most direct acts of resistance in the annals of the Holocaust, for they were a manifestation of the national will of the Jewish people to survive. It is to be hoped that this view will be accepted by those who do research into the Holocaust, as well as by those who help shape public opinion.

There should be special interest in the Jewish Resistance in Hungary not only because of the scope of its achievements, but also because of its character and its exceptional composition. The underground alignment included, in addition to the local youth, young people from Poland, Slovakia, Carpatho-Ruthenia, and Transylvania. It served as a bridge both for the rescue of lives and for the transmission of intelligence from the Jewish centers in the conquered lands to the centers in the free world.

The Halutz Resistance movement in Hungary was created as a result of the cumulative and collective Jewish experience in the Holocaust, but could

operate only thanks to unique local conditions. The components were many. The accumulated knowledge and perceptiveness of the Jews of Poland and Slovakia served as a useful starting point against the background of the accelerated processes of destruction. The annihilation program was halted in Budapest at a time when there were still almost 200,000 Jews there and the end of the war was already in sight. To this combination of circumstances must be added the relationship with the adult Zionists in Budapest. The Resistance people used their help in establishing contacts with international bodies then operating in the capital. Such contacts were useful for rescue purposes since the Hungarian government, and at times the Germans as well, were interested for their own reasons in the continued presence of such organizations. The human aspect provided still another dimension of the Halutz youth groups. Though these groups were relatively small, they were closely knit, and motivated by a deep sense of idealism, which enabled them to find full scope for a wide variety of activities. All these together constituted a most unique combination in Nazi-occupied Europe.

The research for this volume was marked by methodological problems, some typical of all historical research, and some unique to the history of resistance movements.

In the first category was the need to delineate clearly the subject matter and the period to be studied. Determining the latter was fairly easy: beginnings could be considered as the moment the activity of the youth movements was banned in Hungary in 1940, or alternatively as the time of the entry of Hungary into the war, when the first victims were sent off to their deaths, in July 1941. However, I prefer to begin with the arrival of the first refugees from Slovakia in the spring of 1942, principally because that was when the organizational structure, the analytical thinking, and the actual methods of operation of an underground resistance movement began to come into existence. From that point on they developed constantly and consistently.

With regard to the end of the period, I had no hesitation whatsoever. That was the liberation of Budapest by the Red Army in January 1945.

Regarding the subject matter, I have sought to adhere closely to the immediate subject of the research, though there were many other matters which required comment, investigation, and clarification. Among these

were the Relief and Rescue Committee, the Palestine Office in Budapest, and the activities of the *Yishuv*'s delegation in Istanbul.[6] At times I felt compelled to examine and explain matters dealing with these bodies because of their direct association with the Resistance, but I have at all times attempted not to stray from my immediate subject—the history of the Halutz Resistance in Hungary.

This is not a history of the Zionist movement in Hungary nor of all the rescue activities there. I have touched upon such matters only to the extent that they were relevant to the subject. Where the sources at my disposal made it possible, I have sought to describe the history of the Resistance in its full scope and with all the fine differences of the various movements which constituted it.

The other category of methodological problems refers to the research sources. Such problems are familiar in the specialized field of research into underground and resistance movements from the days of the Second World War. Underground movements do not assemble archives. Despite this handicap, we found letters which had been sent by the Resistance people to various bodies, principally to the mission in Istanbul, as well as letters dispatched to them from there. This two-way correspondence extended from the end of 1942 until August 1944. The letters, or copies made at the time, are located in various archives. The largest collection of letters, which were photographed in Israel, is today to be found in the archives of the Ghetto Fighters' House in Kibbutz Lohamei Haghettaot. This correspondence is of the utmost importance for an understanding of the activities of the Resistance up to March 1944, but it also contains much valuable information about the months which preceded establishment of the contact. The German invasion of Hungary on March 19, 1944, interfered with the correspondence, but it continued nevertheless until August of that year. Information is sparse for that period and many details are lacking, but what is available provides an authentic picture of what was transpiring, and a reliable idea of the discussions and deliberations which went on.

The leaders of the Resistance in Budapest carried on an additional correspondence with representatives of the *Yishuv* and the Halutz movements who were then in Switzerland. Such communication was less frequent, but covered a longer period of time. Some of these letters are preserved in the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem, in the Moreshet

Archives at Givat Haviva, in Massau at Tel Yitzhak and in the Ghetto Fighters' House. These archives also contain additional valuable documents which have been useful in this research. An important collection and apparently the most complete assembly of the letters of Nathan Schwalb (Dror), representative of *Hehalutz* in Geneva, is on deposit in the Labor Movement Archives in Tel Aviv. This collection is not open to perusal by research workers, and despite all my efforts I could not obtain access to it. It is difficult to say to what extent the nonavailability of this information may have affected the present study, but the matter is deeply regrettable. The same can be said about the archives in Hungary.

A second major part of the research sources is the personal evidence. I was aware of the special problems connected with such testimony as a reliable source for historical research, a problem which becomes more acute with the passage of time since the occurrence of the events. I have therefore exercised all necessary caution in making use of such sources. I must emphasize, however, that without such testimony it would have been impossible to conduct this research, just as most of the research into the various movements in Europe during the Second World War would have been impossible without eyewitness reports.[7]

The systematic gathering of testimony from the participants in the events was begun in 1972 by a group of former Resistance activists on the initiative of the late Zvi Goldfarb. Seven sessions were held and from six to fifteen persons took part in each. The work of this group was halted by the Yom Kippur War. An additional important source of personal accounts is the Yad Vashem Archives. I have also drawn upon the evidence taken from some of the Resistance members who reached Palestine while the war was still in progress. This material is in the Zionist Central Archives.

In 1977 the Institute for Research of the Holocaust Period of Haifa University and the Ghetto Fighers' House decided to set up a project of its own and resumed gathering testimony on the Halutz Resistance in Hungary. An Advisory Committee, with the participation of representatives of all the movements which were active in the Resistance, was set up to assist in the study. A staff engaged in the work. Some of the testimony was given on an individual basis and some was taken collectively from groups. In some cases additional witnesses were called to confirm various evidence.

The greater part of the various activities referred to in the text are well documented in written sources. These include the rescue of refugees from Slovakia and Poland, the production of falsified papers on a large scale, the smuggling of people to Romania, the setting up of Children's homes in Budapest and others. The personal evidence supplements this information or adds further details. In citing figures I have preferred to rely on written sources. Wherever possible information was checked against testimony from objective sources, although there were a few cases in which a single witness was the sole source of a particular detail. No testimonies were used except those given to scientific bodies for research purposes.

The Halutz Resistance was built on the foundation of existing movements. There was cooperation between the movements, but there was also competition and at times even antagonism, especially toward the beginning of the period. To the best of my ability I have attempted to present an accurate picture of the contributions of each of the movements to the sum total of the Resistance's operations. Unfortunately many of the leaders died during the Holocaust or in the years that followed. Their testimony is lacking, and where such lacunae are particularly significant in the case of one of the movements, I have so noted.

My deep appreciation is due to all who gave personal testimony and devoted many hours to discussions with me. I am indebted to them for many important details, without which this book could not have been written. First drafts of the various chapters were submitted to former activists in the Resistance for their scrutiny, even while the material was in its early stages of editing. Such inspection of the manuscript helped to prevent errors and to clarify important matters. I express profound thanks to all who took the trouble to read parts of the manuscript and made their helpful comments.

Special thanks are due the members of the Advisory Committee, many of them former members of the Resistance. An especially valuable contribution was made by the members of the staff who devoted considerable time and effort to the gathering of the testimony: Zvi Goldfarb and György Orosz, both of whom have since passed away; and Zvi Erez, Asher Arányi and Binyamin Tamir.

I must also express grateful acknowledgment to the heads of the Institute for Research of the Holocaust Period, to Professor Bela Vago, my esteemed teacher, occupant of Strochlitz Chair in Holocaust Studies at the University of Haifa and to the late Zvi Shner, director of the Ghetto Fighters' House. They guided, encouraged, and supported me.

I express deep thanks to the Stzochlitz Institute of Holocaust Studies of the University of Haifa and to the Ghetto Fighters' House for covering my research and publication expenses, to Professor Nathaniel Katzburg, head of the Institute for Study of Diaspora Jewry at Bar-Ilan University, and to Professor Randolph L. Braham, director of the Institute for Holocaust Studies at the Graduate School and University Center of The City University of New York, who both read the entire manuscript and gave me the benefit of their valuable comments. Nevertheless, I assume complete responsibility for any shortcomings which may no doubt be found in this book.

Thanks must also be given to the staff of the several archives, for their assistance. There were so many of them that I refrain from listing the names lest I inadvertently omit one or more. I would like to express my gratitude for the English translation to Carl Alpert, who has skillfully and patiently produced a version which is both readable and faithful to the original Hebrew. I would also like to thank Mr. and Mrs. George Salomon for their generous assistance in making the publication of this book possible.

Finally, my very special thanks to my wife, Arlette, for her patience and her encouragement during the years of research and writing.

Asher Cohen

CHAPTER 1

JEWS IN HUNGARY BETWEEN THE TWO WARS

The *Halutz* Resistance developed out of the Zionist Halutz youth movements, all of which were related to various kibbutz organizations in Palestine. Accordingly, they had diverse political tendencies, ranging from orthodox religious to left-wing socialist.

The activity of the Halutz Resistance is of course an integral part of the history of the Second World War and of the Holocaust, and constitutes the framework of this book. The Resistance and its story is also part of the history of the Jews of Hungary, and of the specific relations created between Jew and Gentile. The unique character of these relations, which developed in the interwar period, is the topic of this chapter.[1]

From the middle of the nineteenth century, the modernization of Hungary was linked to the integration of the Jews into the Magyar (Hungarian) nationhood, a process which was part of the so-called Magyarization. The Magyars, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, enthusiastically accepted this form of Jewish assimilation, which seemed very profitable and successful for both sides. The main advantage for the Hungarians was that the newly assimilated Jews partially counterbalanced the large number of national minorities in the country. This apparently successful process ended with the First World War.

After the signing of the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, Hungary was transformed into a national state, practically without minorities. The Jewish population, which had reached 911,000 in 1910, shrank to 473,000 within the Trianon boundaries (about 6 percent of the general population).

This figure was further reduced by demographic decrease to 400,000 in 1941 (4.9 percent of the population). About half of the Jews lived in Budapest.

This decreasing trend in Jewish population was reversed after 1938. Some of the Jews in Transylvania, which had been annexed to Romania, and the Jews of northern and northeastern Hungary, which had been absorbed by Czechoslovakia, as well as the Jews of Bácska (Bačka) in southern Hungary, which had been incorporated into Yugoslavia, were in 1938-1941 returned to Hungarian rule, and constituted a part of the Jewish population in that country during the Holocaust. The number of Jews in Hungary then reached a total of 725,000. The approximately 100,000 "Christians of Jewish origin," as defined by the racial legislation of 1941, must be added to that figure.[2]

Even before the Trianon Treaty had been signed, Hungary underwent two revolutions and one counterrevolution, the latter headed by Admiral Miklós Horthy. The central elements were a group of radical rightists with extreme anti-Semitic tendencies. Violent anti-Semitism, new and completely unexpected in the liberal Hungary of the first part of the century, began with a wave of terror and murders known as the White Terror, and among its principal victims were the Jews. The stabilization of the conservative right-wing government helped to moderate the violent outbreaks somewhat, but at a cost of the first anti-Jewish legislation in Europe during this period. The *Numerus Clausus* law of September 1920 established the number of Jewish university students in proportion to the Jews in the population, about 6 percent. The White Terror and the *Numerus Clausus* were cornerstones of the Horthy regime, although application of the law and the general attitude toward the Jews was eased somewhat under the government headed by Prime Minister Count István Bethlen, the most prominent political figure during the 1920s.

The fundamental change in the status of Hungarian Jews was primarily a result of the objective conditions created by the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Nevertheless, the participation and the decisive influence of Jews in the shortlived Communist regime of Béla Kun in 1919, were adduced as "evidence" of lack of loyalty, and the "failure of the assimilation" of the Jews.[3] This contention was the central theme in Hungarian nationalist propaganda during those years.

The assimilationist trend of the Hungarian policy was replaced in the early twenties by an opposite trend, which called for "dissimilation."

These new manifestations of rejection of the Jews found expression even beyond political and legislative actions, and extended to cultural and literary areas throughout these periods. Important writers and intellectuals repeatedly maintained that the Jews did not constitute an integral part of the Hungarian nation, and that it was desirable to eliminate at least a portion of them from the national state.

The various governments between the two world wars sought to preserve or to re-create conditions which had existed before the war, except for policy with regard to the Jews. They found in this subject an easy way to divert the increasing social dissatisfaction of the lower classes.

The development of the fascist movements in Hungary toward the end of the thirties was an important element in the general picture, and the influence of the Arrow Cross Party explains to a large extent the readiness of the Hungarians to carry out the deportations after the German occupation in March 1944. The weight of the Arrow Cross (*Nyilas*) members was small in those circles which determined high-level policy, but there were many members of this party, or secret sympathizers, on the intermediate levels of government administration, in the counties and in the cities, in the army and in the gendarmerie.[4]

The integrated process of dissimilation which the Hungarians imposed on the Jews was felt on political, cultural, spiritual, economic, and legislative levels, and reached catastrophic proportions by the end of the 1930s and the eve of the outbreak of the Second World War.

The first two anti-Jewish laws (aside from the *Numerus Clausus*), which were issued in 1938 and 1939, were the first results on the legislative level.[5] As a matter of fact these laws were evidence of an internal Hungarian process rather than of any foreign influence. The first measure restricted activity of Jews in intellectual occupations to about 20 percent. This alone threatened the livelihood of about 15,000 families. The second law caused the dismissal of Jews from virtually all the public services, and created widespread unemployment. Beyond these consequences, the gravity of this legislation was that for the first time a legal distinction had been made between a Jewish citizen and a non-Jew, something which had never existed in Hungarian legislation, not even specifically in the *Numerus Clausus*. This legislation distinguished not only between Jews and Christians, but also between those who had converted to Christianity before August 1, 1919, and those who had converted thereafter. In this

there is undoubtedly an influence of German racism, following its "success" in the policy of dissimilation which had been demanded by some intellectuals. One of the results of these laws was the elimination of Jews from regular military service, and the establishment, subject to military authority, of a special labor service system which ultimately played a significant role in the annihilation process.[6]

It is appropriate to point out here the progressive steps in the implementation of the dissimilation policy developed in Hungary on the basis of ideas which had already begun to appear in the twenties. The process began with proposals for removal of the Jews, including their physical banishment from the country, continued with legislation which at first reduced them to second-class citizens, and reached the stage of actually gathering them into units separate from the non-Jewish population. It is important to note that this legislation preceded the outbreak of the Second World War, and that even the preparations for the labor service system had begun before the war. The first units were established immediately after the outbreak of the war, but long before Hungary itself joined the conflict.

The process of eliminating Jews from any national Hungarian framework reached a new stage with the promulgation of the third statute in August 1941. This legislation sought to regulate the marriage laws, and Paragraph 9 explicitly forbade marriage between Jew and non-Jew. The "failure of the assimilation" was cited as reason for the law. A Jew was defined according to all the criteria of the Nuremberg Laws, and this included about 100,000 Christians who now fell into the category of "Jews." At this stage early in the war it was already possible to discern the direction being taken by Hungarian society in its attitude toward the Jews, and where the road which had begun with the counter revolution, the White Terror, and the *Numerus Clausus* would ultimately lead.

In contrast to this clear and unmistakable development in the attitude of the Hungarians toward the Jewish problem, Hungarian Jews themselves not only continued consistently to ignore and to deny its existence, but also sought to present assimilation as a decidedly positive achievement. For example, Dr. Hugó Csergő, one of the most distinguished intellectuals among the leadership of the community, described three generations of assimilationists, of which his generation was the third in the chain.[7] Typically, his argument idealized conditions before 1914, when loyalty

to Judaism, meaning the community, had been intertwined with loyalty to the homeland, meaning conservative nationalism. This is not the place to verify the facts. It is necessary only to indicate that according to Csergő this "ideal" status, certainly marked by important achievements, was forfeited not because of conditions after 1919, and not because of reactionary anti-semitism, but because some Jews "betrayed their faith and their homeland." It was as if the clock could be turned back, if only the Jews were willing to do so.

Dr. Csergő found no cause to dispute the anti-Semitism between the two wars. To the contrary, he was in almost complete agreement with its reasoning, seeking to demonstrate that the complaints against the Jews were justified only with regard to a small minority who had betrayed Judaism even before they had betrayed the Hungarian nation. Not only was there no conflict between Hungarian nationalism and Judaism, he maintained, there was actually even a harmony between them, and the enemies of one were those who had committed treason against the other. This is but one example of the atmosphere and the ideas which were prevalent among the Jewish leadership.

As for the term "leadership," it should be noted that the majority of the prominent Jewish personalities in the cultural, artistic, economic, and political life—and they were indeed many in number—were not active in Jewish affairs. Research into the special connection which nevertheless bound this elite to Judaism is still needed. At any rate, they cannot be regarded as a part of what would today be called Jewish leadership. The only true Jewish leadership existed in the two *kehillas,* or organized communities.

The largest and the most important was the Neolog, as Reform was known in Hungary. It was modern and innovative in ritual. In 1930, 65.5 percent of Hungarian Jews, most of them assimilated, were affiliated with this *kehilla.* Its national organization was the National Bureau of the Jews of Hungary (*Magyarországi Izraeliták Országos Irodája*), which was clearly dominated by the Budapest *kehilla.* At the beginning of the war Samu Stern was head of both the national bureau and the Budapest *kehilla.* The Orthodox community was a federation of the smaller *kehillas,* especially in the northeastern part of the country, where the Hasidic spirit had penetrated. In 1930, 29.2 percent of Hungarian Jews were affiliated with the Orthodox community. Its national organization

was known as the Central Bureau of the Autonomous Orthodox Jewish Community of Hungary (*Magyarországi Autonom Orthodox Izraelita Hitfelekezet Központi Irodája*), and it was headed by Samu Kahan-Frankl. The remaining 5.3 percent of Hungarian Jews belonged to the Status Quo Ante *kehilla,* which was composed of a number of communities, mainly of medium size, and without a national body.[8]

The relations between the two principal *kehillas* were strained and there was no actual cooperation between them until 1938. Following the first wave of refugees from post-*Anschluss* Austria, and after the passage of the first anti-Jewish law, the two jointly established the Welfare Bureau of Hungarian Jews (*Magyar Izraeliták Pártfogó Irodája*–MIPI), in which the local Zionist Organization also took part.[9]

The MIPI filled a most important function, especially in providing help to destitute Jews after Hungary took over Carpatho-Ruthenia early in 1939. It provided direct relief and helped both in obtaining Hungarian citizenship and in emigration. The MIPI also provided equipment, food, and warm clothing to the labor service units, especially after Hungary entered the war against the Soviet Union, when labor service companies were dispatched to the Russian front in the Ukraine.

Parallel to establishment of the MIPI, a National Hungarian Jewish Assistance Campaign (*Országos Magyar Zsidó Segitő Akció*–OMZsA) was set up to raise funds. For the first time Jewish intellectuals who had hitherto distanced themselves from any activity for Jewish causes took part. The heads of the two major *kehillas* assumed leadership of the OMZsA. The organization was granted formal recognition by the authorities, thus providing a legal basis for the collection of funds. Such recognition was vital to the very existence of the campaign, and great care was taken to do nothing which might in any way be interpreted as illegal. This was in conformity with the outlook of Hungarian Jews and their inclination to be law-abiding, but in many circumstances it severely limited the ability of the organization to help refugees. The latter, victims of expulsion, were unable to understand the scruples of the local body.

An agreement was drawn up between the OMZsA and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee whereby the latter agreed to cover half of the welfare budget, and this was indeed done until the end of 1941, when the United States entered the war and banned all transfer of funds. Thereafter, local Jewry bore all the costs. Although the distinction between

the OMZsA and the MIPI is purely theoretical, this study will deal with the latter only.

The Zionist Organization operated alongside the two *kehillas,* and was subjected to open animosity from both. The Zionists had only minimal influence on Hungarian Jewry, and even toward the end of the 1930s, when the organization began to grow, its membership was only about 5,000, including 1,200 women of WIZO, and another 1500 or 2000 youth who were organized in various movements. The attitude of the *kehillas* was so hostile to Zionism that teachers and pupils suspected of Zionist loyalties were removed from Jewish schools. Ottó Komoly served as head of the Zionist Organization from 1940 and until his death in January 1945.[10]

In the summer of 1940 the attitude of the authorities toward the Zionist Organization took a turn for the worse, and activity of all local units was banned except for the central office in Budapest. This ban was felt most strongly by the youth movements, for all their activities were from that moment made illegal.

In addition to its own weakness, and the hostility of the Jewish establishment, the Zionist movement suffered also from internal strained relations among the various parties. The active parties were *Mizrahi,* the General Zionists, *Ihud-Mapai,* and *Hashomer Hatzair.* The youth movements were divided along the same lines, with the addition of the *Betar* youth movement, associated with the New Zionist Organization of the Revisionists.

CHAPTER 2

FIRST HOLOCAUST REFUGEES IN BUDAPEST, 1942

The dire occurrences in Hungary on the eve of the Second World War weakened the status of the Jews there considerably, both in economic and social terms. A review of the developments within Hungary clearly reveals the steady worsening of the situation, quite obvious even to contemporaries, though Hungarian Jews deliberately sought to be oblivious of the deterioration. Yet in comparison with the condition of Jews in the other European states and in North Africa, Hungarian Jewry was in a relatively good and stable condition during this period. This was not a matter of observation alone, but an objective reflection of the fact that the condition of the Jews in the other countries was rapidly becoming more dangerous.

The rise of Hitler to power in January 1933 brought in its wake a mass emigration from a country in which assimilation had seemed to be more successful and complete than even in Hungary. In 1938, and especially after the *Anschluss* with Austria, there was a growing wave of refugees who sought refuge in European countries, among them Hungary. According to various estimates, about 5000 refugees, at most, came to Hungary. Many among them had personal or family ties in Hungary, or connections from the days of the Empire. Some were Jews of Hungarian origin, now compelled to return to the land of their birth. Additional Jewish refugees reached Hungary from Czechoslovakia after the Germans established the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939, and from Poland after the outbreak of the war in the same year. From 2000 to 3000 Jewish refugees apparently came from these two countries.[1]

Independent Zionist activity began to take shape with the arrival of the first refugees from Poland. Activists from the various political parties dealt with the refugees who were closest to them politically. Shmuel Springmann took care of the refugees on behalf of the Zionist Organization. He was one of the leaders of the Poalei Zion (Ihud Mapai) and later was one of the founders of the Relief and Rescue Committee, on whose behalf he organized the regular contact with the delegation from Palestine, which was located in Istanbul at the beginning of 1943.[2]

Economic subsistence of the refugees was undertaken by MIPI, which financed their assistance. For this purpose, improvised camps were set up in the yards of synagogues and other Jewish institutions on Rumbach, Páva, Magdolna, Damjanics, and Szabolcs Streets. These camps, which were known by the names of the streets in which they were located, existed during the entire period of the war.

During this time the border guards were very severe with Polish Jews seeking entry, in contrast to their policy toward Polish Christians. Attempts were made, among others by the Jewish Baroness Edith Weiss, to bribe the border guards to facilitate the passage of the Jews. This was done apparently with the knowledge and financing of MIPI.[3] Thus, there were exceptions to the law; but there were no large-scale illegal activities, like falsifying of documents, which would take place much later. For example, Springmann obtained 300 Polish passports bearing dates prior to the outbreak of the war, though they had in fact been issued later. The passports were produced by the Polish Consultate, and were therefore authentic and legal.

A separate and independent level of activity was that carried out by the Revisionists and their youth movement, *Betar.* The latter operated in the city of Sopron, on the Austrian border, where the *Betarim* organized relief activities for the refugees after the *Anschluss.* They also operated in Carpatho-Ruthenia after the arrival there of the first refugees from Poland. At this stage *Betar* began to organize the departure of refugees from Hungary to Bulgaria via boats on the Danube. It is known that a Bulgarian Jew, Dr. Baruch Confino, organized the illegal immigration in this way, using boats that reached Bratislava.[4]

During this period at the beginning of the war, when there were still no clear indications of the policy of annihilation, the Jews of Hungary learned of the terrible condition of the Jews in the neighboring countries from tales told by the refugees, as well as from the media. They concluded

that, by contrast, their own condition was relatively good. Indeed, during this period Hungary was an island of relative peace and tranquility.[5] The faith that "Horthy would not permit any harm to come to his Jews" appeared from day to day to be justified anew.

Hungary declared war against the Soviet Union in June 1941, and by the end of that year was also in a state of war with Great Britain and the United States. The hostilities with Britain, which held the Mandate over Palestine, had special significance for the Jews. Neutral Switzerland undertook to represent the interests of Britain and the United States in Hungary.

The most important actual change in German policy toward the Jews since Hitler rose to power took place with the German invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, an event which, as noted, dragged Hungary into the whirlpool of the Second World War. That invasion marked the beginning of the mass murders by the *Einsatzgruppen,* during which close to a million and a half Jews, among them about 14,000 who had been deported from Hungary, were killed in Eastern Europe.[6]

The expulsion from Hungary was executed in August 1941, on the initiative of the National Central Alien Control Office (*Külföldieket Ellenőrző Országos Központi Hatóság*—KEOKH), a special department set up within the Hungarian police. Despite what might have been understood from its name, the KEOKH dealt not only with actual aliens, but also with tens of thousands of Jews, principally from the areas that had been attached to Hungary, who for one reason or another could not at the time establish their Hungarian citizenship.

More than 14,000 of the 18,000 Jews handed over by the Hungarians to the Germans for "resettlement," were murdered in the vicinity of Kamenets-Podolsk, in eastern Galicia.

The deportation to Kamenets-Podolsk might have been regarded as a solitary episode, but this was not true of the policy adopted by the government and the military toward the labor service.[7] When Hungary entered the war, somewhat more than 14,000 young Jews had been drafted, but early in 1942 a mass conscription took place, following which about 50,000 men in these units were sent to the eastern front. Living conditions were very bad, and in addition to the many who were killed as a result of military activity, others died of disease and cold. The men in these units did not bear arms. Furthermore, the Hungarian officers did not hesitate to use them as human minesweepers: they required the

Jews to advance in frontal columns through the minefields. The attitude of the Hungarians to these units cannot be explained by German policy, nor as a one-time chance phenomenon. This was the policy of thousands of Hungarians who commanded these units and received orders from their superiors not to return any of the Jews alive to the homeland.

The Bárdossy government opened the year 1942 with a campaign of slaughter in the Bácska (Bačka) area in the south of the country, around the city of Ujvidék (Novi Sad), which had been detached from Yugoslavia a year earlier and made part of Hungary.[8] The pretext was that this was a police combing operation against partisans, but in fact it was a planned mass murder carried out by the regular Hungarian forces, and its victims were about 2,500 Serbs and some 700 Jews. The main purpose of the operation was to suppress the Serb nationalists, but the occasion was exploited to kill Jews as well. In addition to the deportations and the labor service system, this was a most ominous sign of the rise of violent anti-Semitism among the population, and especially in the army, the police and the gendarmerie.

In March 1942, Horthy dismissed Bárdossy and in his place named Miklós Kállay as prime minister.[9] Kállay was a faithful supporter of Horthy, and though there was no clear change in policy toward the Jews during his first year, the change in personnel contributed to a clearing of the atmosphere. It appeared that Horthy's reaction indicated that he had a limit beyond which he was not ready to go. In contrast to what was occurring in other European countries, the conditions in Hungary in March 1942 seemed, if not to have improved, at least to have stabilized. The dangerous developments of the preceding year had ceased.

At the very time of the Bácska massacre, the Wannsee Conference was taking place in Germany.[10] This meeting was held to coordinate and implement decisions, already taken on the highest level, for the Final Solution. There is no doubt that the conference opened a new era in the process of annihilation, a period of mass deportations and death camps. A report of the conference reveals that Reinhard Heydrich, head of the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA), did not anticipate any difficulties from Slovakia in carrying out the Final Solution, and that it had indeed already begun to operate. The roundup of Jews began in Slovakia at the beginning of March, especially of young people earmarked for deportation—or, as they were told, for labor in the Reich. As a matter

of fact, they became the first victims of the gas chambers of the largest murder camp in history, Birkenau-Auschwitz.

The beginning of the deportations from Slovakia was followed by the first great wave of refugees from that country to Hungary. In a short time their number grew so rapidly as to constitute a serious factor in the life of the Hungarian Jewish community. Among these refugees were also Jews from Poland who had succeeded earlier in fleeing to Slovakia.[11]

A group of members of halutz youth organizations was conspicuous in this heterogeneous mass of refugees. During this period halutz youth movements were identified as those which had ideological and organizational connections with one of the kibbutz movements in Palestine, and educated their members for life on a kibbutz. In Hungary this definition included the following movements: *Hashomer Hatzair,* affiliated with the *Kibbutz Artzi,* a left Socialist movement; *Hanoar Hatzioni,* located on the other side of the political spectrum, and associated with its *kibbutzim* and with the General Zionist Party; *Dror* and *Habonim,* Socialist movements attached to the *Kibbutz Hameuhad,* and politically belonging to the *Ihud Olami–Mapai.* (These two united in Hungary in 1943 and became one movement). *Maccabi Hatzair,* also affiliated with the *Ihud Olami–Mapai* Party, but associated in Palestine with *Hever Hakvutzot; Bnai Akiba (Hehalutz Hadati),* a Zionist-religious movement associated with the *Mizrahi Olami,* with connections in Palestine with the *kibbutzim* of *Hapoel Hamizrahi.* All these movements were members of the *Histadrut,* the General Federation of Jewish Labor in Palestine. The delegation in Istanbul (see below) therefore provided a natural address for all of them, irrespective of whether members of one movement or another were represented at any given time in the delegation. The only Zionist youth movement which was not affiliated with the Zionist Organization in Hungary nor with the general delegation in Istanbul was *Betar,* connected with the Revisionist New Zionist Organization. In 1943 the relations between *Betar* and the other Zionist youth movements gradually became closer, and with the German occupation the cooperation grew ever more. Though the term halutz did not then embrace the *Betar,* that movement is recognized as an integral part of this research.

These young people preserved the political frameworks in which each operated, and constituted a stimulating and provocative factor among the friends of Zionism and the local youth groups.

Refugees continued to arrive in Hungary at an irregular pace from March 1942 until March 1944. At the same time, some refugees left Hungary—a few for Palestine, and the others back to Slovakia, after it appeared that the wave of deportations had ceased.

Until the deportations, Slovakia had itself been a haven for Halutz refugees from Poland, who had begun to reach there early in 1941. The influence of the Polish refugees on the local Halutz movement was an indication of what was to take place in due course in Hungary. The first of the refugees in Slovakia brought with them the fearful expectation of annihilation. This was a small group of about 35 Halutzim who had been sent by their movements to seek out paths to safety in the south, with an eye to the possibility of emigration to Palestine. Most of them were veteran activists, and they served not as refugees but in the main as representatives of a movement.

Many Halutzim in Slovakia were much disturbed by the reports of systematic murders carried out by the Germans upon their entry into Poland.[12] It is doubtful if the refugees' warnings were given any heed among the Jews of Slovakia outside of the limited frameworks of the youth movements. Within these organizations, in the day-to-day contact between the refugees and the local youth, the tales told by the newcomers were absorbed with anguish. News of the massacres after the German invasion of the Soviet Union made credible the stories that had seemed shocking early in 1941. In the spring of 1942, when the first rumors became rife of preparations for transfer of the Jewish population for labor and for resettlement in the eastern provinces, some of the Polish refugees in Slovakia and some of the members of the local movements decided to seek temporary haven in Hungary. The influence of the refugees from Poland stimulated many of the local youth to take this decision as well.

As has been seen, Zionist youth movements in Hungary were illegal, and the police permitted only the Zionist Organization to maintain its head office. With it all, the authorities did not react with severity to the activities which the movements continued to carry on clandestinely in private homes or in the offices of the Zionist Organization, since these seemed to be harmless child's play. A genuine underground began only with the arrival of the refugees. The contact with them, and the attention given them, for the first time placed the local movements in actual danger,

necessitating greater caution and personal risk. Nevertheless, alongside their help to the refugees, the local members continued to live their lives normally with their families.

The project for large-scale border crossing, known in the secret correspondence of the time as *tiyul* (in Hebrew, a trip or excursion), began at this time. There were two motivations for the organized *tiyul* to Hungary: one, the relatively good condition of Hungarian Jewry at this time, and two, the possibility of continuing on from Hungary by legal or illegal means and reaching Palestine.[13] The organization of a *tiyul* was made easier by the fact that until 1918 all of Slovakia had been part of the Hungarian Kingdom, and most of the Jewish population spoke Hungarian. A part of southern Slovakia—the so-called Felvidék—was reannexed by Hungary on November 2, 1938 and some of the members of the Halutz movements in the area found themselves again in Hungary.

It was agreed in all the movements that Hungarian-speaking members would go on a *tiyul* to Hungary, whereas the others would remain in Slovakia and seek to escape the deportations with the help of false papers testifying they were Aryans. There were always some who preferred to board the deportation trains rather than be parted from their families. At any rate, the decision was left to each member.

At the outset of the *tiyul,* contact was established between the headquarters of the movements in Bratislava and Budapest, and news of the *tiyul*'s departure was given in advance. The crossing of the border was organized on Slovakian initiative, while the reception of the members in Hungary was handled by the movement there.[14] In this way Polish members of *Dror* and *Hanoar Hatzioni,* who had no chapters in Slovakia, also reached Hungary. Their influence on the parallel organizations in Hungary was extremely important.

The border crossing was carried out by professional smugglers, resident in the border area. The boundary between Slovakia and Hungary was at this juncture new, artificial, and wide open; and local farmers, who had business, family, and at times even land on both sides, consistently crossed. In some cases members of the movement were sent to the border area to receive the refugees and to help them reach Budapest. However these were chance occurrences, and not systematic.

Each movement dealt with its own refugees. Cooperation between the movements found expression on the personal level through the passing

on of information, advice in matters of "papers," and the like; but there was no established coordinating organization for the movements. It quickly became clear that this unsteady contact was of little real help. As a matter of fact the movements in Hungary completely lacked experience in organizing underground activities.

This first stage of what became the Resistance movement was characterized by naiveté and lack of experience on the part of both refugees and those who received them. The possibility that there might be a need to organize a *tiyul* to Hungary had been considered in Slovakia at a relatively early stage; but there too, no organized preparations had been made for carrying out the mission. And when the deportations began, the initiative was personal and local. When they reached Hungary, the refugees found it difficult to adapt themselves to the style of life required by their illegal status.

In most cases, the refugees did not know whether or not they were to be met at the border; they did not know how long the trip to Budapest would take; and they did not always have Hungarian money. At the end of April 1942—soon after the beginning of the *tiyul* from Slovakia—close to 20 members of the local leadership of *Hashomer Hatzair, Maccabi Hatzair,* and *Dror* were arrested after a refugee who had been caught blurted out the name of Simcha Hunwald, secretary of *Hashomer Hatzair,* and additional refugees were found in his home, as well as a list of the names of local activists.[15] This was the first time that Zionist youth had had an open confrontation with the Hungarian police, and it then became clear that the authorities were deadly serious in their threat that anyone caught helping illegal refugees would be sent to detention camps. As a consequence of these first arrests a void was created in the local leadership, especially in *Hashomer Hatzair* and in *Maccabi Hatzair.* Furthermore, the male senior members of the local movements had already been conscripted into the Labor Service System. The void was quickly filled by Slovakian members, and thus it came about that some of the refugees were transformed from recipients of aid to purveyors of help. They not only dealt with the refugees who continued to arrive, but also assumed positions of leadership in the local movements.

The contacts of the refugees were not, of course, limited only to the youth movements. Many among them had relatives in Hungary. Many made contact with the community institutions or with the official Zionist

Organization. Most of the testimonies report with some bitterness that the local people treated them coldly and with a lack of affection. At least this is the way the refugees felt. Relatives were in general ready to provide one-time help, but refused to accommodate the refugees in their homes. It should be recalled that this was during the first year of Prime Minister Kállay's administration. Hungary under Horthy had been a police state even before the war, and certainly after 1941. The Hungarian authorities acted with heavy hand against refugees and against those apprehended in the act of helping them. Officials of the Zionist Organization also refused to extend help, according to evidence. On the other hand, the refugees received considerable assistance from individual Zionist personalities and especially from the youth movements.[16]

The problems which faced the refugees in Hungary during the first period may be categorized as follows:

a. To locate immediately a place to live—shelter for a night or two.
b. To obtain identification papers in case of chance inspection in the street.
c. To find a source of livelihood for a prolonged period.
d. To create contact with a Jewish social, organizational, and political environment.

The problem of housing during the first few days had various solutions. So far as is known, refugees who approached the official agencies did not receive any real help. At best the agencies arranged a contact for the refugees with members of the suitable movement. With regard to help from families, it is difficult to generalize. As stated previously, all the testimony available indicates outright unwillingness on the part of the families, even the closest of kin, to take in refugees who lacked legal status. In many cases families were willing to play host to refugees for a single night, but not more. The danger of police reaction, which would result in imprisonment in detention camps, was very real and threatening. The chances of being caught were also great because of informers among the neighbors, or building superintendants. Refugees who had spent some time in Hungary wrote to Istanbul that "because of even minor help to refugees, entire families had been sent to concentration camps."[17]

Refugees who managed to reach Budapest and establish contact with their movement were in a relatively better position. The organizations placed their club facilities at the disposal of the newcomers for the first night, and many were given shelter by the local members in the days that followed. After the refugees had been integrated, they were the ones who saw to the absorption of the next group of refugees.

The problem of housing was tied up with the problem of certificates. Each apartment house in Budapest had a superintendent who not only kept the building clean but also fulfilled a number of other functions, formal and informal. According to the law each individual who moved was required to notify the police, within 24 hours, via a "notification of change of address" form (*bejelentőlap*). The formal duty of the superintendent was to certify on the form that the registrant did indeed live in the house; his informal function was to keep an eye on the tenants on behalf of the police. Anyone seen entering the building more than once or twice—and especially if he were seen leaving in the morning and returning in the evening—aroused suspicion and subjected his hosts to the danger of an almost certain "invitation" to report to the police. It must be borne in mind that Hungary, which was an authoritarian state in any event, increased police supervision during the war. The political department and KEOKH were the most efficient agencies.

A refugee who wished to remain in one place more than a single night therefore had to arrange for legalization of his residence so far as the superintendent was concerned. In general this first certificate required by every new refugee in Hungary was the least complicated. The blank form could be purchased openly at any tobacco store and the tenant had only to fill it out and have it stamped at the local police station. One section of the approved document was given to the superintendent. The problem was to obtain the police stamp of approval.[18]

At first pre-stamped documents were purchased from the Budapest underworld, but this practice was soon discontinued because of the high price and the dangers involved. The fact that the suppliers used extortionary pressures, and the fear that it they were caught they might inform on their customers, also led to a break in this contact with the underworld, many of whom, incidentally, were Jews. New ways were later found to procure the precious police stamp.

The next step in obtaining personal documents was to acquire an authentic birth certificate. To begin with, the refugees used certificates borrowed from friends or family. This inadequate method endangered both the bearer of the certificate and its true owner, and it was therefore used only when there was no alternative. Nevertheless, in March 1944, many refugees bore such borrowed certificates. Eventually a more reliable system was developed and became widespread. Any person could without difficulty obtain a copy of a birth certificate in the local population registry office merely by providing basic data orally. This was true even if the person concerned was no longer in Hungary. It became clear that anyone who entered the registry offfice, especially during rush hours, could peek into the birth registry volume and copy the details. Some would ask the clerk to look up a fictitious name, and when the latter could not find it, the visitor would offer to help, and taking the book in his hands make a note, written or mental, of a number of names and the exact birth dates. Later, someone would return and request a certificate for a genuine name, which the clerk would locate without difficulty. Another method was to copy names from the display windows of stores which photographed documents. Possession of another document or two, such as from a place of employment, an identity card with a picture, a pass for the trolley or for a swimming pool, which usually bore a picture of the possessor, all helped make the identity more authentic. Old envelopes, which the bearer had purportedly received at the address indicated, were also useful. It was not compulsory to carry identification cards with a picture, and these were quite scarce. Most refugees had certificates and papers of the type noted above and these were sufficient for chance identity checks on the street. The rule was that the best papers were those which did not have to be shown. The chances of a refugee getting away with the subterfuge depended more on his personality and his bravado than on the quality of his papers.

Another problem was to obtain food coupons. In Hungary, as in most European countries during the war, basic foodstuffs were rationed, and coupons were required for their purchase. These were distributed every three months by the superintendent of each building. If a tenant's coupon did not reach his new home he could always explain that because of administrative hitches his coupons had been sent to his old address, but this explanation could by no means be used twice. The result was that refugees

were compelled to change their place of residence every three months, or at most, every six months.

The various certificates described above were usually prepared during the very first days of a refugee's arrival. They usually sufficed to establish identification during routine checks. However, the documents were of little value if the individual was called upon to identify himself because of suspicion, or because he had been informed on, or if he were arrested and taken to the police station. Many refugees were put in detention camps and returned to Slovakia, especially during the first half of 1942. Those who were only returned to the border were able to arrange for a new *tiyul,* but many were handed over to the Slovakian border guards, and ended up on the deportation trains.

It was easier to obtain employment than to acquire documents or find a place to live. For the most part the refugees held simple day jobs, often working for Jews who chose to turn a blind eye to the origins of their new employees. The risk of hiring a refugee was considerably less than the danger of lodging him even for one night.

Day-to-day social contact proved to be an extremely difficult problem. The members of the local movements continued on with their normal lives, whereas the refugees lived in a world of danger and hideaways. Few dared to invite the refugees to their homes, and even when they did, it was only for short periods. Because of the circumstances, the refugees were compelled to do the best they could among themselves. The Slovakian refugees found life somewhat easier because contacts had been kept with the movements in Bratislava, and there was an almost constant crossing of the border between Slovakia and Hungary, in both directions.[19]

Thus the refugees lived not with the Hungarian Jews, but alongside them. They were under the perpetual pressure from problems deriving from their illegal status and the resulting danger of imprisonment and banishment, whereas the local Halutz youth, with all their dedication and their desire to help, continued their normal lives at their studies, at work, and—most important—with their families.

Many refugees became more and more active in the local movements and in some cases became the actual leaders, but they always remained outside the "normal" social existence. In their testimonies many refugees expressed gratitude and appreciation for Hungarian youth and adults who tried to make life easier for them. That such instances were at all

remarkable reveals the depth of the problem and the absence of any true solution.

The refugees came from a world of terror, while the Jews of Hungary still lived a civilized and orderly existence. It was difficult to bridge these two worlds. Every refugee who had been rescued was oppressed by the knowledge that hundreds of thousands of others, his own family and friends among them, had unlike him, not survived.

The nature of the relationship with the local groups can be understood against the social and psychological background of the refugees' struggle between, on the one hand, full participation in movement activities and, on the other hand, an unbridgeable remoteness and strangeness.

The most important Jewish and Zionist organizations which dealt with the refugees were MIPI, the Palestine Office, and the Relief and Rescue Committee

Expectations by the escapees that they would receive direct help from MIPI were in general not realized because of the legal restrictions that office imposed on itself. Nevertheless MIPI did perform a number of important tasks which were not always properly appreciated by the refugees. These undertakings were for the most part connected with the camps in which the 1939 refugees were housed and which were legally approved by the authorities. It will also be recalled that these camps were also used by the KEOKH for internment of those sent to Kamenets-Podolsk. After the deportations ceased, the camps remained under police supervision, but they were maintained by MIPI. In most of them the regime was free and easy. All the new arrivals who came during this period, in contrast to those who came from Poland in 1939, were illegal. If they were caught, and not returned immediately to Slovakia, they were kept in these camps and could consider themselves, at least for the time being, in a relatively safe place. Those who were held in the general detention camps, were political prisoners and members of banned movements were also kept, were in a much worse state. Such camps were in Garany, Ricse, and Csörgő. Living conditions in them were very difficult. On the other hand, the conditions in the Budapest camps were so lenient that sometimes the detainees refused to leave, even when their movement was able to bring about their release.[20]

This arrangement for maintenance of the detention camps by a Jewish institution came about on the initiative of KEOKH. Were it not for this,

most of the refugees arrested would have been deported at once. After the 1941 deportations the results of this alternative were quite well known to the leaders of the Hungarian Jewish community. Dr. Imre Reiner, head of the Legal Department of MIPI, which was concerned with obtaining citizenship primarily for Jewish residents of greater Hungary, wrote openly that "during the deportations to Galicia in 1941, documents attesting to a man's citizenship constituted for our deported brethren not simply personal freedom but life itself."[21] This statement was in line with the function of these camps, as understood by the local Jewish leadership.

The refugees were convinced that no legal framework could guarantee their lives or their continued stay in Hungary. They had no doubt whatever that in Hitler's Europe there was no value to any written law, and that today's legislation could be worthless tomorrow. At this stage Hungary was still a country based on law, and Hungarian Jewry stubbornly relied on the legal guarantees of their security. They believed that the law that had been assuring their existence would continue to be their salvation. The refugees recognized that this was the outlook not just of the community establishment but of Hungarian Jewry as a whole, and there is no doubt that on this matter MIPI did indeed faithfully represent the viewpoint of most Hungarian Jews.

The Halutz refugees had an entirely different attitude toward the Palestine Office. This was not a community institution under the influence of assimilated Jewry, but a Zionist body; and the refugees therefore expected considerably more from it. In many cases this was the first address to which they turned when they came to Budapest.

The president of the Zionist Organization was, as already noted, Ottó Komoly, a General Zionist. Komoly was acceptable to all, and was detached from the internal political squabbles and the intrigues, large and small. This was both his strength and his weakness. He had been chosen for his prominent position not least because he had been a front-line fighter during the First World War, and was considered a representative personality for the Hungarian establishment. However, he was far from being involved in the day-to-day activities of the Zionist political bodies. He represented Zionist affairs, but did not conduct them. The most important Zionist activity during this period centered around the Palestine Office which was administered, in fact, by a committee whose composition was determined according to the proportionate strength of the parties in the 1939 Zionist Congress.

According to the agreement between all the Zionist parties, the ratio was as follows: *Mizrahi,* 43%; *Hashomer Hatzair,* 27%; General Zionists, 17%; *Ihud-Mapai,* 13%. The executive of the Palestine Office was composed of Ottó Komoly, Mihály Salamon (from *Mizrahi*), Ernő (Zvi) Szilágyi (from *Hashomer Hatzair*). The most important activity, distribution of the immigration certificates to Palestine, was within the jurisdiction of the Palestine Office committee, in which *Mizrahi* and the General Zionists had three representatives each, *Hashomer Hatzair* two, and *Mapai* one. Day-to-day administration was conducted by the secretary of the Office, Moshe (Miklós) Krausz, of *Mizrahi.*

Within the Office committee a strong and unusual coalition was set up between *Mizrahi* and *Hashomer Hatzair.* Since these two commanded a majority between them, the General Zionists and *Mapai* were relegated to a minority. Relations between the two groups were tense, to put it mildly.[22]

The bitter controversy within the Palestine Office left its mark on Zionism in Hungary throughout the war, and must therefore be dealt with separately. At this point, we need to note only that the controversy existed and that the Office dealt with matters of *aliyah.* It was in constant touch with the various authorities—the Ministry of the Interior, the police, and various diplomatic delegations—for the purpose of obtaining safe-conduct documents necessary for emigration. The office therefore refrained from any illegal activities which might endanger its official and respected position.

The arrival of the refugees created a paradoxical situation in Hungary. Genuine help could be given only in an unorthodox—that is, illegal, manner. There was no organized Jewish or Zionist body which could undertake this task except for the youth groups, but they were small, lacking in experience, and themselves illegal.

Several of the youth movements maintained very close relations with a number of the Zionist activists. The more dynamic among these, and perhaps the most experienced, were those of *Ihud-Mapai.* These included Shmuel Springman, Joel Brand, and Dr. Israel (Rezső) Kasztner. They were the ones who set up what was later known as the Relief and Rescue Committee. The birth of this body was intertwined with refugee problems agianst the whole background of the internal political relations in the Zionist movement, as described here, and the contact with the delegation in Istanbul, which will be described in the next chapter.

None of the three was a Hungarian. Springman has already been referred to. Brand was himself a refugee. He was born in Translyvania, lived in Germany, was banished from there in 1935, and became a Zionist only after he and his wife, Hansi, reached Budapest.[23] His first steps in helping refugees was taken after the arrival of the first group from Slovakia in April 1942. Many refugees could not find any public body which could help them in their daily underground existence, and those among them who were affiliated with the youth movements turned to Brand. Thus the home of Joel and Hansi Brand was transformed into a center of help for refugees, especially for the youth. It is difficult at this point to distinguish between personal and philanthropic factors on the one hand, and Zionist-political motivations on the other. They were intertwined, and only much later did the political component increase.

Israel Kasztner came from Transylvania, and had previously been secretary of the Jewish Party (*Partidul Evreesc*) in the Romanian Parliament. He was an active Zionist worker and correspondent of *Uj Kelet,* the daily Zionist paper in Hungarian. The Hungarians closed down the paper in 1940 and Kasztner moved to Budapest, where he became what is known as a "professional Zionist." Despite his talents, this occupation did not bring him any respect from the local Jews.[24]

The fourth personality, and the least known in matters concerned with the activity of the Committee, was Moshe Schweiger, an outstanding lawyer and intellectual from Szabadka (Subotica) in northern Yugoslavia.[25]

Unlike most Hungarian Jews, this group was prepared to operate along unconventional lines—for the most part illegal—to help the Halutz refugees who were streaming into Hungary. This readiness was based not on any formal authority or the prestige of any recognized leadership. At the outset their activities were marked by only a very limited political-Zionist character, and derived in the main from personal initiative and response to personal problems. Activists like Brand and his comrades were to be found also in other Zionist movements as well as in the non-Zionist Orthodox community.

The various stages of organization continued for about a year and a half, from the spring of 1942 until the fall of 1943. At no time did the Relief and Rescue Committee ever receive formal approval from Hungarian Jewry.

Brand maintained most of the contacts with the refugees. Springmann had widespread connections, among the most important of which were the

couriers who were his contacts with Istanbul. Kasztner was apparently the brains behind all the activity and the liaison with the official Jewish and Zionist institutions. He provided the leadership with the latest information. Through him contact was kept with community agencies and wih the Relief office, which not only were aware of all this activity, but even supported it with large amounts of money.[26]

CHAPTER 3

1943—THE SITUATION EASES

The beginning of 1943 was a period of change on every level. The first significant modification occurred outside Hungary's boundaries. The deportations from Slovakia had ceased in the fall of 1942, the stream of new refugees was slowing down, and some of the escapees even began to return there. In Hungary there was an improvement in the attitude of the government toward the refugees. The general change in policy was caused first and foremost by a marked worsening of the military situation of Germany and its allies.[1]

One of the first and immediate expressions of this shift was an alteration of the attitude to the Jews. During his first year as head of the government, Kállay revealed no special affection for the Jews. Though there were no deportations during his term, Jews were deprived of the right to hold agricultural land. The attitude of the police toward the Jews was in general negative. Great efforts were made to prevent the entry of refugees, and many of those who were caught were driven back.

Kállay's second year in power was even marked by somewhat of a softening in the attitude of the authorities that—together with the approach of the Red Army to Hungary's eastern border—gave Hungarian Jews cause for hope and optimism.

The marked change in attitude to the refugees began early in 1943. No longer were special efforts made to catch them, and those who were apprehended were no longer deported. Most of the detentions at that time were a result of chance circumstances or a consequence of black market dealings, false papers, or denunciations by informers. This change was also true of the attitude to refugees from Poland, and most of those who came during that year obtained a formal status, though as Polish Christians, rather

than as Jews. The government and the Polish Committee (see below) supported these refugees with fixed monthly grants. As a result, their condition was better at this time than that of refugees from Slovakia.

The opening of the Palestine mission in Istanbul also helped improve the Zionists' condition. This deputation, which included representatives of the kibbutz movements, gathered information on the fate of European Jewry, and sought to extend relief and rescue to the activities of the Halutz movements who were under Nazi rule. On both these levels, the Zionists of Budapest performed a major function. The dispatch of the Palestine delegation to Istanbul decisively transformed the status of the rescue workers in Budapest.

The first letters from Istanbul were sent by post, but Springmann realized that this was no way to maintain a systematic communications network, and he began to organize the connection through emissaries.[2] The first to be drafted for this purpose was Andor (Bandi) Grosz, who later accompanied Brand on his famous "blood for trucks" mission to Istanbul. According to Springmann, the hand of fate brought about his meeting with Grosz. The two had been friends during school days, but the contact between them had been broken. They met again, quite by chance, at the very moment when Springmann was looking for someone who could get to Turkey without attracting attention. Within a few days another man, Erich Popescu, was enlisted for the same purpose, and he actually went to Istanbul first. These two, like most of the couriers who would come later, were in the espionage service of the Hungarians or the Germans, or both. Springmann was also helped by the official dispatch-bearers of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry. The mission of the couriers was to transfer messages and funds between Budapest and Istanbul, for which task they were well paid. If money were transferred, their commission was usually 10 percent of the amount conveyed. Later, they would carry out mission to the camps and to the ghettos in Poland, to Theresienstadt, and eleswhere. This is not the place to tell the full story of the couriers, but it must be noted that they were responsible for the contact created between the committee workers and the German counterespionage (*Abwehr*) in Budapest, a contact which was later to be of supreme importance.

The widespread correspondence which ensued between Budapest and Istanbul during 1943—most of which was preserved and remains in our hands—constitutes one of the principal sources of our knowledge about

the period. With the help of this material, it is also possible to estimate the size of the refugee population in Hungary at that time. The number of refugee members of all the youth movements, up to the fall of 1943, ranged between 300-400 at most. Membership from among the second wave of refugees, mostly from Poland in late 1943 and early 1944, was estimated at from 150 to 200 persons. It appears, therefore, that on the eve of the German invasion–and after some of the emigrés had returned to Slovakia –there were in Hungary no more than 600 Halutz refugees.[3]

The overall number of newcomers was of course much larger, but the statistics are unreliable because of the underground status of most refugees. An estimate of from 10,000 to 15,000 would seem to be not far from the truth.[4]

The number of members of the youth movements in the general emigré population was small, but their influence during these two years before the German occupation went far beyond their number. They brought about basic changes in the structure of Hungarian Zionism, and especially influenced the organization and character of its youth movements. The great significance of these changes became apparent after the German occupation.

As has been noted, the correspondence from Istanbul brought not only letters but money as well. Venya Pomeranz (Professor Zeev Hadari), a member of *Hakkibutz Hameuhad,* who was considered the head of the delegation, wrote at the end of December 1942 that the money to reach Springmann was intended for all the youth movements. From the general tone of the missives, it appears that the delegation in Istanbul saw itself as the policy-making body in rescue activities, and treated its contacts in Hungary as merely executors of that policy. The personnel in Budapest were considered not as equal partners, but rather as agents to carry out instructions. This tone is found in the later correspondence as well.[5] What is more, this subordinate role seemed natural to the workers in Budapest, either because of the natural respect which Zionists had for representatives from the *Yishuv* in Palestine, or because of a sense of their own weakness in the local public arena. The only ones who credited the Relief and Rescue Committee with a degree of prestige were the Halutz refugees. Consolidation of the relationship between Budapest and Istanbul for the first time gave the Committee effective public power as a result of the funds which came into its hands from Springmann and Brand. It is no

exaggeration to state that the prestige and the political power of the Relief and Rescue Committee for the most part rested on their control of the financial resources received from Istanbul.

Thus two competitive focal points were created in the Zionist movement in Hungary early in 1943. One, the Palestine Office, was headed by Krausz (Mizrahi); the other, the Relief and Rescue Committee, was controlled by Brand, Springmann, and Kasztner (*Ihud*). The Office dominated in matters of *aliyah* certificates, while the Committee was the determining agency with regard to funds. Public interest should have dictated some sort of supervision on both levels, which were sources of important political power. Whereas there was a committee administering the affairs of the Palestine Office, there was at the beginning of 1943 no similar representative body which could check on the funds arrived from Istanbul. A broadly based, all-Zionist, interparty committee could have filled this function. The conditions in Hungary at the time were such that a committee of this nature could have been set up without difficulty, and only internal Jewish factors were responsible for the delays and the obstacles.

In the first months after its opening, the office in Istanbul made no request for the establishment of a committee in which all the Zionist parties would be represented. The members of the delegation had no first-hand knowledge of the political rivalries within the Hungarian Zionist movement. They had been sent to try to rescue Jews, and especially members of the Halutz movements, and could not understand that political competition was still dominant in Hungary in 1943. The operations of the Committee at this stage satisfied the expectations of the *Yishuv*'s representatives in Istanbul. Hungary itself was not an object of rescue operations, but a waystation closest to Poland and Slovakia. Brand and Springmann were requested to be meticulous in distributing the support funds among all the movements, but the first instructions from Istanbul emphasized geographic distribution, rather than political considerations.

The local youth movements, though still illegal, experienced a period of growth and development in late 1942 and early 1943. The effort on behalf of the refugees was at the heart of all their activities, and this program brought them for the first time into direct relationship with persecuted Jewry. Despite this contact, only few cases are known after the end of 1943 in which a member of a local youth movement preferred to go underground rather than serve with the labor service system. Their only illegal

activity centered around saving refugees. The Halutz youth of Hungary, in their own lives, were still deeply rooted in obedience to the law.

In February 1943, on the initiative of the Committee, a courier was for the first time sent to Poland for the purpose of smuggling Jews into Hungary.[6] He was one of the contact men, who maintained touch with Istanbul. As the influence of the refugees on the local relief program increased, missions of this sort became more frequent. The couriers had funds and addresses which had been received from refugees or from Istanbul, though in most cases the addresses proved useless. Even when contact was established with central personalities in the Halutz underground in Poland, the latter were not always willing to be rescued, and others were often brought to Hungary in their stead. At the outset, the instructions were clear and specific–to seek out people affiliated with a movement; but during the course of time the guidelines were changed, and the rescue attempts became more and more general. The couriers were advised to leave the money with any reputable Jewish element, meaning the local *Judenrat,* in cases where contact could not be established with representatives of the movements.[7]

As may be seen, the couriers' missions to Poland filled varied functions. Even if they failed in their primary task–to take people out and bring them to Budapest–they did succeed in handing over funds which helped the recipients; and they also brought back up-to-date information on what was going on in Poland.

One of the escape routes into Hungary went from the Lwow area to Carpatho-Ruthenia, then under Hungarian rule. The region was thickly populated with Jews. The road, which was hilly and difficult of passage, was used by remnants of the Polish army and by some Jews who managed to move along it throughout the period. Such movement was usually disorganized, and the information on it is therefore scanty. When the deportations from Poland to the death camps began in 1942, the traffic in this area increased, and refugees' testimonies are available.[8]

Activity on this border continued only until the beginning of the winter, when difficult weather conditions in the mountainous area compelled a halt. Obviously the activty was not resumed in the spring of 1944. It is reasonable to assume that some of these Jews reached the border crossing, or at least the border area, unaided. Kasztner estimated that in this way about 600 people were rescued, though the correspondence would appear to indicate a lesser number.

It is difficult today to evaluate objectively the usefulness of the relief funds which reached the Jews in Poland, Theresienstadt, and elsewhere. Very likely thousands were saved thanks to this help, and tens of thousands more were able to prolong their lives. In this way contact was also made with the German industrialist Oskar Schindler, who at the beginning of 1944 still employed thousands of Jews in the war industry in Cracow. He visited Budapest twice and met with members of the Relief and Rescue Committee, who received reliable information from him, and he even used his good offices for the transfer of funds to Poland.[9]

Most of the money came from Istanbul, but small sums were also received from Geneva, and the Committee continued to raise funds locally as well. Committee members regarded Poland as their primary goal, since there was no other way of aiding Jews there, and they invested enormous efforts in this direction. At the same time the members of the Committee were subjected to severe criticism, even from Zionist circles, on the grounds that they were collaborating with German intelligence personnel and engaging in illegal activities, thereby endangering the legal status of the Zionist Organization and all of Hungarian Jewry.[10]

Early in 1943 the *tiyul* committee set up under Joel Brand's leadership dealt in the main with absorption of those refugees from Poland who had managed to cross the Hungarian border in the Carpatho-Ruthenian area. Some of them—escapees from the ghettos or camps—had wandered for many weeks in the Carpathian forests, and had arrived crushed, enfeebled, and completely destitute. The Committee's work was conducted by refugee activists and by professional smugglers as well; they were well paid for their efforts. The smugglers also crossed the border to help the fleeing refugees or to locate Jews in hiding, whose addresses had been obtained from refugees who had reached safety. To be sure there were also instances of swindling. Smugglers exploited the situation to extort money from the Committee, and occasionally "smuggled" the same refugee a number of times. Sometines the addresses were of no avail, because help had come to late.

Reports sent by the *tiyul* committee to Istanbul reveal that several smugglers were sent to the Lwow area to search for Jews hiding there and to transfer them to Hungary. At the same time representatives, apparently from Springmann's contact teams, were sent through Slovakia and reached Cracow, and in two cases even Warsaw. The Committee sent

a detailed account of its expenditures to Istanbul, from which it is learned that between March and the end of September a sum of about 178,000 *pengős* (1 *pengő* equalled 0.19 dollars) was spent, mostly for aid to refugees, while in October alone they paid out 115,000 *pengős* including payments to smugglers. This sharp increase was caused principally by the internal distribution, and attested to the change in the method of work. Similar reports were also sent to Nathan Schwalb (*Dror*) in Switzerland.[11]

A typical phenomenon during this period was the arrival among the refugees of many orphans. At first these children were gathered into two special camps. Later a Children's Home was established for them in the city of Vác, about 30 kilometers north of Budapest. The institution was under the auspices of the Polish Committee, and the inmates were designated as children of Christian refugees from Poland. There were about 50-60 children of all ages, and most of them went to Palestine with a legal children's *aliyah* through Turkey at the beginning of 1944, and before the German invasion of Hungary. The Refugee Committee supported this institution too, though it appears that the greater part of its budget came from other sources.

The reports that streamed into Budapest, and from there to Istanbul and Palestine, were shocking. The general news of what was going on in Poland, and of the mass slaughter of Jews there, was already known by the end of 1942, but only the reports brought by the couriers, and the testimony of refugees who had managed to escape in 1943, afforded the first opportunity to realize the full scale of the Holocaust. Requests for addresses in order to rescue Halutzim came from Budapest as late as May 1943, but by that time many refugees were already telling of the destruction of entire communities. The first eyewitness reports of the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt came in June. In July it was reported from Budapest that apparently there was no longer any Jewish community left in Poland.[12]

Most of the communication during this period was with the Cracow and Będzin areas, but couriers also managed to get to the vicinity of Lwow and even to central Poland. The systematic annihilation of communities was known in Budapest immediately, though at times the details were incorrect.

Evidence was taken from each refugee, recorded, passed on through Istanbul to Palestine. The stupefying information served to accelerate the rescue work, and even the budgetary limitations—which had weighed

heavily on the delegation in Istanbul—were lifted. Couriers continued to be sent to Poland, Theresienstadt, and now also to Prague as well; but the extent of their success there is not known. For a short while there was also contact with Vienna, and money and food were sent there. Communication was also established with Croatia, where the Jews were in dire straits. Komoly, who in general took no active part in the rescue operations before March 1944, nonetheless gave his personal attention to Croatia.[13]

The Relief and Rescue Committee was at the center of all this farflung activity. Its original composition was unchanged, but most of the work of dealing with the refugees was carried out by the local Halutzim and the refugees themselves. The contact with the delegation in Istanbul stimulated and heightened the local initiative. The team in Istanbul emphasized again and again that the eyes of the entire *Yishuv* were on Hungary.

The activist youth from Poland and Slovakia who had found refuge in Hungary constituted a perpetual pressure group. They also initiated independent activities which sometimes went beyond what the members of the Committee had expected. It was felt that the youth were displaying complete irresponsibility and taking reckless risks.

Istanbul constantly requested increase of the *tiyul,* especially from Poland, but they also advised the members in Slovakia to send more refugees from there to Hungary. On the other hand, the activists in Budapest and Bratislava pointed out the serious shortcoming of the *tiyul* in that those rescued could not proceed on to Palestine. Those in Croatia, too, linked passage to Hungary with possible increase of *aliyah* from there. Special note should be taken of a long letter sent to the World Zionist Executive by the adult Zionist leadership—Ottó Komoly, Ernő Marton, Ede Izsák, and Niszon Káhán—in which they maintained that if the possibility of *aliyah* were increased, it would be much easier to influence the Hungarian authorities to permit the entry of more refugees, and it would be especially possible to rescue additional children from Croatia and Slovakia.[14]

As has been noted, the request to set up a body which would include all the movements and Zionist parties came as a result of the information which the delegation in Istanbul obtained from the first letters received from Budapest. At the end of April—apparently for the first time—the delegation sent instructions that all parties should serve on the Committee,

and a representative of each should verify receipt of the funds. The workers in Budapest, who had orignally organized on their own initiative, became dependent on the financial aid from Istanbul, and the delegation there exploited this dependency. When the establishment of the reorganized committee was delayed too long, Istanbul dispatched more money —conditional on the cooperation of all the Zionist parties. A letter from Springmann and Dr. Siegfried (Stephen) Roth on May 21 made it clear that things were moving, though the *Mizrahi* and *Hashomer Hatzair* had not yet been added to the work of the Committee. Roth was a prominent leader of *Hanoar Hatzioni* and represented the General Zionists in various institutions, including the Committee of the Palestine Office. He was the first from outside the *Ihud* to be added to the Committee.

Brand did write to Istanbul at the beginning of September that Ernő (Zvi) Szilágyi, Jenő Fränkel, and Ottó Komoly had been placed on the Committee, but this letter was signed by Brand alone, and not by the representatives of all the movements, though this had been one of the repeated demands of Venya Pomeranz and his colleagues. There is no confirmation signed by Fränkel or Szilágy which would confirm Brand's report. Nevertheless it does appear that in September 1943 agreement was at least reached on the composition of the committee.[15]

The Polish Committee, which had operated in Hungary since the beginning of the war as an official mission of the Polish government-in-exile, was not abolished even after Hungary entered the war. Its principal task was to look after the Polish refugees located in Hungary, most of them army personnel who had fled from the German conquest. This mission was not free of anti-Semitic tendencies and displayed open animosity to the Jews. A change in the Polish mission's stand took place in the summer of 1943, apparently under the pressure of the Polish government-in-exile in London. The change found expression primarily in a readiness to extend its patronage over Jewish refugees as well, on condition that they appear before it as Polish Christians. Undoubtedly at least a few members of the Polish mission knew exactly what they were doing, since by that time there were almost no refugees from Poland except Jews. Upon the intervention of Dr. Ignacy Schwarzbart, a member of the government-in-exile, a Polish Jewish refugee, Zvi Zimmerman, was added to the mission to deal directly with the necessary documents and to facilitate their issuance. The official certificates gave the refugees legal status and

afforded them a somewhat comfortable existence, on condition that they maintain their Christian identity, and did not get into difficulties with the police. This support required the refugees to leave Budapest for another city.[16]

The second wave of refugees from Poland reached Hungary early in June 1943; among them were some of the survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto. Eliezer Unger, secretary of *Hashomer Hadati* in Poland, and other refugees who had succeeded in escaping from Poland after the destruction of the ghettos, were the first to report personally on the annihilation of Polish Jewry. Most of the refugees reached Budapest in various ways from September 1943 until just a few days before the Germans entered Hungary in March 1944. By the end of 1943, the Jewish communities of Poland had already been utterly destroyed. Not only those of Warsaw, but those of most of the cities and villages of the country had been systematically purged of Jews, who were sent off to the death camps. Those who fled from Poland were the last remnants of this Jewry, and they were under no illusions. They were convinced that they were the last Polish Jews left alive. By way of contrast, the situation in Slovakia during this period was relatively calm after the cessation of the deportations in October 1942, and Zionist activity continued in semi-underground condition.

The mainstream of refugees came via Slovakia. On the basis of the available lists of names that were transferred from Slovakia to Hungary between October 1943 and January 1944, it may be estimated that about 1500 succeeded in escaping decimation in this way. The number of Halutz members among them came to between 150-200 youth, of whom about 60 were members of *Hanoar Hatzioni* from Upper Silesia. They constituted a dominant element, and members from other movements gathered around them.[17]

These young people, aged 17 to 20, all with rich experience in the Resistance movement in Poland, did not consider themselves refugees seeking rescue, but Resistance fighters who had simply transferred their operations from Poland to Hungary. The idea of trying to rescue individuals was first raised by the movement in the Będzin-Sosnowiec region late in 1942. The plan was to take advantage of the fact that Polish laborers were sent to work in German areas, and seek to attach Jews, mostly girls, to these groups. They were provided with Aryan documents, prepared in advance. The organized youth were convinced that to remain

in the ghetto meant death. As Polish laborers in Germany, they would have a chance to survive, and indeed in this way a number of girls did remain alive. Yet when the proposal was formally taken up in the movement it was rejected as a movement policy on the grounds that all efforts should be put into the war against the Nazis, and not in individual rescues. The subject was raised again after the Warsaw Ghetto revolt, and after efforts to obtain arms for a revolt in the Będzin region failed. Following the destruction of the Ghetto on August 1, 1943, two rescue proposals were made: one, to increase the effort to pass girls on to Germany; two, to break a way through Slovakia, from where they could go on at once to Hungary. The organizers were assisted in this by professional smugglers, who were paid with the last clothing possessed by the refugees. Upon reaching Slovakia the survivors were received by the Jews of Žilina, the Slovakian city closest to the border. Activists of the *Kvutzat Haavoda* in Bratislava organized the continuation of their journey to Budapest, and in most cases even saw to it that they reached a safe haven.

These two rescue channels, one the smuggling of refugees through Slovakia to Hungary, and the other the transfer of "Aryan laborers" to German cities, operated simultaneously. The trip to Slovakia was laborious. En route—disguised as Polish laborers on holiday—many hid out in the mountainous regions on the Polish side of the border. The first members of the *Hanoar Hatzioni* group from Będzin-Sosnowiec reached Hungary close to the High Holy Days in September and were absorbed mainly by experienced members of the movement. At one stage some members of the group were still in Poland while others were already in Germany or Austria. Contact was maintained throughout between them and those who had already reached Hungary.

The first concern of the members in Hungary was to assemble their colleagues who were scattered in German cities. Thanks to conscientious correspondence the contacts were preserved and the project did indeed succeed. By the beginning of March most of the group reached Budapest. An unusual aspect of this flight, perhaps the only one of its kind, was that these young people took along some of their middle-aged parents. The group included not only their own parents, but also those of friends who had been killed in Poland or had already gone to Palestine. The rescue of about twelve parents was a moral obligation and a Zionist national duty for them.

These refugees were not certain how to translate their desire for vengeance and for battle against the Nazis into practical activity under the conditions prevalent in Hungary. During the first period of their existence they had to devote most of their efforts to stabilizing their existence under new and unfamiliar conditions. They concentrated in a pension in the heart of Budapest on Kossuth Lajos Street. Toward the end of 1943, most of the members of this group were in the southern city of Mohács, which had been selected because it was close to the region in which partisans operated on the Yugoslav border. Contact was made with the latter, and representatives of the Jewish group met on the banks of the River Dráva, which was the border between Hungary and Serbia, with a girl who represented the partisans. The story was told by Tushia Herzberg, who was the spokesman for the Halutz group:

> I told her we were a band of twenty people, all young, Polish partisans who were willing to join them. She replied: 'Excellent!' . . . She told me where to wait and at what time to come. Before we parted she said: 'If there is a Jew among you, don't send him.' I replied, 'Of course.' After lengthy deliberations our group decided that this condition made it impossible for us to join. In Budapest or in any other place in the world, we could hide as Christians, but when it came to fighting, we wanted to fight as Jews.[18]

The first activity of the refugees was a direct continuation of the experience they had gained in Poland—attempts to procure weapons and to create false documents. The second level, no less important to local Jewry, was to seek to clarify for Hungarian Jews, and especially for members of the youth movements, exactly what had happened in Poland and how it had happened. They held the firm conviction that the same scenario would be repeated all over Europe, and sooner or later in Hungary as well. However, before evaluating the influence—or lack of it—of these refugees on the Jewish population in Hungary, it would be well to take note of the vast gulf which separated these two utterly different types of people.

It was not easy, at the end of 1943, to go from Będzin, after the slaughter of all the Jews, to Budapest. Many refugees found it difficult to accustom themselves to the metropolitan character and the dimensions

of the Budapest of that era. It was a city much larger than any they had known hitherto. They were enthusiastic about the lively cultural activity which was still taking place; about the cinemas, which showed French films; about the theaters, the concerts and the opera. They had not expected a place where there was no "yellow star," and Jews could walk about freely without fear, and could go on trips to the lovely Buda mountains. The refugees were amazed by the tranquility of Hungarian Jewry and by the relative freedom which they enjoyed. "How many kilometers apart are Budapest and Auschwitz? A whole world separates them. Free Jews, walking about the streets. They could not believe our stories, which did not even pierce their consciousness." Thus did Fredka Mazia describe the confrontation.[19] They found a Jewish community in Budapest the likes of which they could not have imagined existed anywhere in Europe.

To the Jews of Budapest, the refugees seemed somewhat provincial, people from another world. This conception served to call into question the trustworthiness of the information they sought to transmit—information which Budapest Jews did not want to believe. In most cases there was neither a common language nor a common philosophy of life. A clear distinction must be made between the failure of the Polish refugees, especially those who came at the end of 1943, to influence the general Jewish population and its communal leadership, and their success with the members of the youth movements.

Much has already been said and written about the fact that Hungarian Jews in general, and their leadership in particular, failed to capitalize on the information brought by the refugees about the Holocaust. All the refugees insisted that Hungarian Jews should prepare for ghettoization, deportation, and death. When this process did indeed begin after March 19, 1944, exactly as they had predicted, they accused the Hungarian Jews of blindness. But that their most dire forebodings came true does not at all prove that their premonitions were necessarily logical or of a high degree of reasonable expectancy in the light of the actual situation in Hungary at the time. Their absolute confidence that what had happened in Poland and Slovakia would also transpire in Hungary grew more out of intuition than out of any objective conclusions.

On the eve of the invasion there seemed to be no reasonable cause for a sudden worsening of the situation in Hungary. The German occupation was completely unexpected, and the fact that so many Hungarians would

in such a short time be mobilized to carry out the deportations to the death camps was even less anticipated. Furthermore, in order to judge the validity of the refugees' warnings, one should bear in mind two other allies of Germany, Romania and Bulgaria, where, for various geographic and political reasons, all the Jews living there at the beginning of 1943 were saved.

The members of the Zionist youth movements did react to the warnings of the refugees, but their doing so did not mean that they were gifted with any more foresight than the rest of the Jewish population. Their point of departure was different to begin with: They were Zionists, they were young, and they were more susceptible to new impressions; their sense of identity was centered around the Jewish people, and not the Hungarian nation. To the same extent this was true also of the Relief and Rescue Committee, whose members had also come under the influence of the refugees and the mission in Istanbul. Therefore, despite the sense of strangeness and alienation between the refugees and the local Jews, a close and warm relationship was established with the members of the youth movements. This contact was based on personal acquaintanceship and on mutual confidence which overcame objective difficulties, including language.[20]

In December 1943, *Hanoar Hatzioni* organized a large winter camp at Lake Balaton, in which the refugees from Poland played a central role. This was the first direct encounter with the Polish refugees for the 70 local senior members and leaders who constituted the elite of the movement, including also youth from northern Transylvania. The refugees gave the locals practice in the use of pistols, fighting with clubs, forging of documents, first aid, and preparation of bunkers. The program and administration of the camp were conducted by the local leadership, but there is no doubt that the Halutzim from Poland took a leading part in these matters. Little remained of the practical training, but the encounter itself created a deep impression on the local youth. Above all, they recalled the tales of suffering, of the liquidations, and of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising which were told during those winter nights in the darkened chambers of the underground. They remembered the Yiddish ghetto songs which their colleagues from Poland taught them, though most of them did not understand the language.

As previously, the contact between the Polish refugees and the local youth was maintained for the most part within the movement frameworks.

Despite the marked improvement in relations between the various movements, there was still tension because of the controversies over distribution of funds and immigration certificates to Palestine.

The new Polish refugees had a direct influence on the thinking only of the members of their own movements. Knowledge of the facts of the extermination failed to bring about any decisive action; even more, the information itself was not immediately transmitted from movement to movement, or else it was not properly received.

The selectivity of the information which was passed on among the various movements may be learned from the words of Efra Agmon, of *Hashomer Hatzair* in Hungary, who was already living in the underground:

> I was active in the movement, and since 1943 in the Resistance, and I can tell you that we had no feeling of Holocaust. I learned of the extermination for the first time in February 1944, when Chaika Klinger came to us and lectured for the members. Until then—nothing! I did have an uncle who returned from Kamenets-Podolsk and told us all that had occurred there, but we looked upon that as an exceptional case, and not as the trend for the future, certainly not the direction of our own future, for the Jews of Hungary. I recall that at about the same time, January-February, Moshe Alpan began to organize training in self-defense.[21]

At that meeting, Moshe Alpan (Pil), a refugee member of the same movement in Slovakia, explained:

> We were sharply conscious of approaching danger. It is difficult to explain today how and why. Of course we had no knowledge that the Germans would invade Hungary in March, but we were absolutely convinced that the catastrophe was bound to occur. We reacted perhaps out of instinct. . . . In February we already began to seek weapons.

In December 1943, the Hungarian government surprisingly cancelled the ban on activities of the Halutz movements. As a result, and until the German invasion, activity increased dramatically in the movements. However, it was marked by inner contradictions in its objectives. Extreme

optimism existed alongside the deepest of fears. Both tendencies existed simultaneously, and neither tempered the other. The activists in Hungary itself were not the only ones affected by this seeming paradox. It had an effect on the members of the Istanbul delegation, who at one and the same time also influenced the activity in Hungary and were in turn swayed by it.

Under the impact of the legalization of their activity, and the pressure put upon them by the refugees, several movements decided to step up their activities in the provincial towns so as to strengthen their cadres and to alert local Jewry. In most cases the local leadership prevented them even from establishing contact with the community. And in cases where contact was indeed made, there was no serious response to the warnings of the young people.

During the months preceding March 1944, there was simultaneously a growing feeling of imminent danger and the hope that perhaps Hungarian Jewry would be rescued nevertheless. The approach of the Red Army to the eastern border, and the relaxed policies of the Hungarian government, fully justified the optimistic reactions, and these were encouraged by Istanbul as well. They, too, were desensitized by a feeling of false security induced by the Hungarian tranquility. Yet it was characteristic of the sense of danger that at this period, for the first time, there was also serious consideration of the possibility that the situation in Hungary would change for the worse.

Even earlier, Eli Sajo was the first to give expression to practical ideas for action, and wrote them out in the event that the situation should worsen. On September 20, 1943, he wrote in Hebrew to Istanbul about the possibilities under consideration: a *tiyul* to Romania, and a *tiyul* to the freedom fighters in Yugoslavia. At the very least, self-defense would be essential when life was in danger: "for if we have to die, then let's die with honor."[22]

Although no actual preparations were made, this was the first time that practical proposals were posed in the event of a German occupation. The concurrence of these suggestions with the arrival of the first group from Będzin was not coincidental. The programs they wrote about in January were already more detailed: (1) Disguise as Christians; (2) *Tiyul* to the partisans in Yugoslavia; (3) *Tiyul* to Romania; (4) Flight to the Carpathian Mountains.

Funds were requested from Istanbul for implementation of these programs, and at the beginning of February money was indeed forwarded. A few days before the invasion in March, Istanbul appointed a Haganah (defense) Committee, headed by Moshe Schweiger (Bar-Zvi).[23] What importance the initiators and executors attached to the Haganah policy, and precisely what each party had in mind, are difficult to judge today. It is clear, however, that up to that point the subject had not been raised, and even then, when it did appear on the agenda it remained second in importance after the *tiyul* from Poland. The rescue of refugees, and especially those from Poland, had always been emphasized by Istanbul as the main task of the local activists.

In fact, the Haganah Committee was practically inactive. What little was done centered around the intermovement committee which dealt also with concealment and falsifying documents. The paucity of material available on this subject, and the imminence of the German invasion, prevent a thorough inquiry, but on the basis of all the evidence it is clear that the "defense" was a limited operation which left no deep impression.

A small legal *aliyah* to Palestine was resumed at the beginning of 1944. The *aliyah* certificates were received by refugees and some local Zionists, among them Shmuel Springmann, Josef Korniyansky, and Eliezer Unger.[24] This *aliyah* restored the Palestine Office to the center of activity, and the confict between the movements broke out once more over each *aliyah* permit. During this period some of the refugees who had recently come from Poland also went to Palestine. The clear feeling which dictated the selection was to enable witnesses of the annihilation the opportunity to get to Palestine, where they could report on what had happened and was continuing to happen, especially in Poland. This opportunity for *aliyah,* limited though it was, contributed to the optimistic atmosphere which characterized the first three months of 1944 in Budapest.

A summary of the changes which took place among the Halutz youth in Hungary during the two years which preceded the German occupation reaffirms that the Halutz refugees were responsible for the basic transformation. Those who came with the first wave in 1942 were of course unable to bring with them the sense of Holocaust. Nevertheless, it can be said that even then significant changes were already taking place among the local youth organized in Halutz movements. The very fact that there was a large community of refugees living in a foreign country under

illegal conditions, made two things quite clear to those who were in daily contact with them: first, that all Jews in Europe under German hegemony were in constant danger of their lives; second, that there were solutions even to this situation, even if they were only partial: either flight to a neighboring country in which the conditions were relatively less severe, or taking up life in the underground with the help of false Christian documents. Hungarian youth came to realize that if circumstances in Hungary should ever become like those in Poland or Slovakia, an entirely new and unfamiliar predicament would be created.

The refugees preached a simple message: Consistent and absolute disobedience to every Nazi order or instruction, and avoidance of any permanent solution. This approach always sought temporary solutions, on the basis of faith that Germany would be defeated in the war, and then the great hour of the Zionist movement would dawn. Jewish youth in Hungary, on the other hand, exactly like their parents, had been raised to respect the legal institutions of the Hungarian homeland. The presence of the refugees among them for two years made them aware of the possibility of an illegal existence and of the fact that, under extreme conditions, existence was possible only in that way. This was the essential change and, as noted, the first wave of refugees was responsible for it.

The great importance of the second wave of refugees was in making the Holocaust tangible. The refugees revealed to the local youth that the Jews of Poland had in effect already been destroyed. It did not necessarily follow that the fate of Hungarian Jews would be identical with that of Polish Jewry. The Hungarian Halutz youth believed, with their parents, that "it could not happen in Hungary." However, when this faith was shattered in March 1944, the youth was able to appraise the situation realistically better than any other Jewish element in Hungary, including the official leadership. The young people trained in the movements were able to alter their mode of thinking in the face of the Nazi occupation, and undertook rescue techniques which had heretofore been used only for the refugees.

The integration of the refugees and their blending into the local youth movements altered the character and structure of those movements. The lives of the refugees in Hungary were marked by complete lack of faith in everything fixed and delimiting. They had no families and no obligations. The need for such matters was met by their identity with the movement.

They were practically "professional" members of a resistance movement, and it is therefore no surprise that they set the tone in the various organizations. Furthermore, the lack of leadership in most of the Hungarian movements, which were in any event smaller and weaker than their sister organizations in Slovakia and Poland, provided a field of action for the refugees who had recently arrived. Patterns and images of the youth movements of 1944 were in no way identical with those which had characterized them in 1942.

The Relief and Rescue Committee in Budapest and the delegation in Istanbul were the most important public agencies dealing with the refugees and with the development of the Halutz Resistance. The Committee came into being out of internal political bickering. No complete solution was found for the problem of supervision, especially over the funds which were being received, though by the end of 1943 the atmosphere cleared somewhat and a practical base was established for cooperation between the various movements and the members of the Committee.[25] Even while the dispute was going on in Budapest with regard to composition of the Committee and its authority, it had become in effect one of the efficient instruments in the whole system of refugee rescue. Thanks in large part to the network of couriers set up by Springmann, Budapest had become a central point for the transfer of people and intelligence from the extermination area. The *tiyul* committee was one of the few organizations, in addition to the activists of the "Working Group" in Slovakia, which dealt with refugee rescue on a day-to-day basis. It is difficult to imagine how the delegation in Istanbul could have operated if not for this important link in the Hungarian capital.

It will be recalled that the Committee had begun its work even before the arrival of the delegation in Istanbul, but during the year preceding the German incursion it became more and more dependent on the representatives from Palestine. This constituted the principal legitimization for its existence. Accordingly, the policies of the Committee were dictated from Istanbul, and most of its activities in accelerating the rescue from Poland and Slovakia were in response to instructions received from Istanbul. Hungarian Jewry itself was a marginal subject, which came up only at the end of the period. In all of the instructions received from Istanbul there is no mention of struggle in Hungary in any form, except for the setting up of the Haganah Committee whose function, as has been noted, was quite unclear.

CHAPTER 4

March 19, 1944

On Sundary, March 19, 1944, the Germans swept into Hungary, and within a few hours transformed the Jews of that land from faithful and dedicated Magyar citizens into Jews condemned to death.[1]

The German occupation, which would continue until May 5, 1945, may be divided into two different periods. The first lasted up to October 15, at which time Horthy was deposed after his unsuccessful attempt at negotiating a ceasefire; the second period was characterized by the rule of the Arrow Cross Party, headed by Ferenc Szálasi.

The first period itself was not monolithic in character. The roundup and deportation of the Jews of the provincial cities was conducted up to the beginning of July; thereafter, the Jews of Budapest were the only ones remaining in the country. During the period of deportations the Halutz Resistance movement became organized and crystallized for rescue operations on an ever larger scale.

The first days after the occupation were marked by a completely unforeseen development. The reference is not only to the Jewish population, which has been charged with political blindness, but to the social and political system in Hungary as a whole.

Two days before the invasion, Regent Horthy was summoned to meet with Hitler for consultations. During his stay in Germany he was informed of impending events by the Führer himself. Horthy returned to Hungary

in a special train simultaneously with the entry of the conquering forces. During his journey he already began negotiating for a change of government with Edmund Veesenmayer, who had been appointed Plenipotentiary. These deliberations went on for three days and resulted in a compromise solution—the designation as new premier of Döme Sztójay, who had previously served as Hungarian Minister in Berlin and was a fervent supporter of Nazi policies. After the appointment of the new government Horthy seldom intervened in the administration. During the entire critical period up to the completion of the deportations from the provincial towns at the end of June, Horthy refrained from any interference in the handling of the Jewish problem. At the first session of the government on March 29, Sztójay was able to inform the ministers that the Regent explicitly was not demanding that regulations connected with the government's policy toward the Jews be submitted for his prior approval.[2] By this stand, Horthy, who possessed enormous moral authority over and above his formal powers, was in effect foresaking his Jewish citizens.

The purpose of the German invasion was, in the first place, to prevent Hungary's withdrawal from the war, and also to intensify the economic exploitation of the country for the war effort. It was clear, however, beyond these basic reasons, that the move would also bring in its wake the Final Solution of the Jewish problem. Demands to this effect were more than once directed at Horthy during his meetings with Hitler, and also through his Minister in Germany, in whose hands he had now placed the government.

The Hungarian administrative machinery remained intact despite the occupation, and the country's autonomy was perhaps more free than in any other land under German conquest. It was clear from the outset that the program of deportation and annihilation of Hungarian Jews by Adolf Eichmann's special department would never have been possible without both the statutory base which a legal and recognized Hungarian government could provide, and the administrative facilities of the state, necessary for execution of its policies. The Hungarian historian György Ránki was quite correct when he delineated the role played by the government and the administrative authorities at every level in the process of liquidating Hungarian Jewry:

> Eichmann's main office was in Budapest, but within a short time he set up ten branches in outlying cities. From the point of view of size

> of staff his unit seemed unimportant. The head office in Budapest consisted of Eichmann himself, six experts, and an additional 30 people, 20 of whom were guards. In the entire country his staff was composed of about 200 people.
>
> Obviously, the German regime could operate only if it could rely to a large extent on the Hungarian state administrative machinery. Without the assistance of the various offices and the officialdom of the counties, the cities and the towns, as well as the police, the gendarmerie and the army, the whole Nazi conquering machine would within a few days have ground to a halt. What was unique about the German regime in Hungary was that a relatively large degree of national sovereignty was left in the hands of the Sztójay government, even more than had been done anywhere else in Europe, including Denmark . . . . The gendarmerie willingly assumed the task of organizing the deportations with the help, direct or tacit, of the administration.[3]

The entire police administrative system dealing with the organization of the evictions, the ghettoization, and the deportation was handled not by the Germans but by the local people. This situation went far beyond what is usually termed "collaboration." This was a case of local initiative to carry out total deportation, in some instances even with enthusiasm.

Since the German occupation of Hungary came so late in the war, ample information was already available in advance on the nature of the Nazi extermination policy. There is no doubt that Hungarians knew of the mass murder of the Jews in Poland months before March 1944. In addition to the slaughter of most of the Jews of Poland and Slovakia before that date, most of the Jews of Western Europe had already been deported to the Nazi death camps of Poland. A similar fate had been met by the Jews of Salonika, a portion of the Jews of Bulgaria, and almost all the Jews of Croatia. Some of the transports from the Balkans passed through Hungary, and people heard the cries of the victims in the freight cars, begging for water.

On the other hand, it was known that most of the Jews of Bulgaria and Romania, who were members of the Axis, had not been deported. The Hungarian political authorities as well as the leadership of the Jewish communities certainly knew what was happening in Eastern Europe

between the years 1941 and 1944. This unique situation afforded certain important advantages which were not available to other Jewish communities in the earlier stages of the Holocaust. However, what useful benefits were derived from this prior information? Practically none! The response of Hungarian Jews was determined more than anything else by the character of this Jewry and the nature of its leadership, as well as by the special relationship between Hungarians and Jews which had developed between the two wars.

Immediately following the invasion, the Gestapo assembled the leadership of the Budapest *kehillas* and demanded the establishment of a Jewish Council (*Judenrat*) to serve as the sole and united representation for the entire country. There was no reason to expect that the leaders would refuse to carry out this demand. Samu Stern, the head of the Neolog *kehilla,* was placed at the head of the *Judenrat.* He was a prominent example of the Jewish bourgeoisie, extremely wealthy, and known as a philanthropist. He was considered a Hungarian patriot, and bore a distinguished title—Counsellor of the Hungarian Royal Court. The outstanding representative of the Orthodox *kehilla* was Fülöp von Freudiger, who took an active part in the affairs of the Council during the first months. The members of the Council came from the leadership of the two *kehillas,* and were more or less homogeneous in their origin and outlook. They all belonged to the upper middle class or the lower aristocracy. They were all conservatives, considered themselves great Hungarian patriots, and were associated with the dominant political elite. The Secretary of the Neolog *kehilla* in the capital, Ernő Munkácsi, wrote his memoirs immediately after the war, using as source material the documents found in the *kehilla* archives. He described this leadership, headed by Stern, as "lacking contact with the Jewish masses and unaware of their problems."[4]

The Jewish Council turned out to be a tragic failure of a leadership. It lacked both ability and initiative—particularly during the deportation of almost half a million Jews from the provincial towns in a matter of two and a half months. This impotence of the Jewish leadership was part of the failure of the general Hungarian leadership and public, in whom the Jews had placed such complete and blind faith. These two failures are intertwined, and were a consequence of the contradictory interpretation given to assimilation during the two wars—its rejection by the Hungarians, and the Jewish unawareness of this rejection. The unquestioning confidence

that Horthy "would not permit the deportation of his Jews" was not born out in 1944. Indeed, until the turning point in that year, it had successfully stood the test. To be sure, the Hungarian Jewish leadership had more time than the leadership of any other Jewish community, before the deportations began. But once they did, the Jews actually had less time than they had anywhere else. The status of the Hungarian Jewish community and its leadership was similar to that of the Jews in Germany at the end of the Weimar period, both in the nature of the assimilation and in the increase in local political anti-Semitism. The essential difference in the condition of the two communities was the rapidity of the rate at which the deportations took place thereafter. In Germany the process took more than six years, whereas in Hungary less than two months elapsed from the entry of the Germans until the first of the deportations.

The fate of the majority of the Jews of Hungary brought to a tragic end the process of dissimilation that had begun 24 years earlier. The pace of the deportations, speedier than any in the entire history of the Holocaust, was made possible only because of the ideological and psychological preparation of the masses, within one generation, for just such a possibility. The German conquest eliminated not only part of the political leadership but also all restraints, and made the deportation of the Jews from Hungary part and parcel of an all-European program. It also embraced that program in a larger design, or at least provided a pretext for including it in that design. The background and the prompt readiness for all this were already in existence.

The members of the Relief Committee in Budapest were caught unaware by the German occupation no less than the formal leadership. Only three days before the invasion they sent to Istanbul an assessment of the situation drawn up by a German counterspy. He foresaw an improvement in the status of the Jews of Europe as a result of the success of the military in its confrontation with the Nazi SS.[5] If anyone had any sort of plan to fall back upon in the event of a German entry into Hungary, it was certainly not Kasztner. His immediate reaction was to seek to return to his native city, Kolozsvár, but he was finally persuaded to remain in Budapest. It is difficult to ascertain now if Kasztner at that time already had aspirations for leadership beyond the limited activities in which the Committee was then engaged. All later evidence was influenced in one way or another by the events which ensued. At any rate, he certainly held no dominant position.

In the first few weeks after the occupation, the leadership of the Jewish Council, as well as Ottó Komoly and other personalities, sought to establish contact with Hungarian statesmen or senior government officials so as to clarify the situation. Even after the first encounter with SS officers in the offices of the Neolog *kehilla,* however, and despite the attempts by Dieter Wisliceny and Herman Krumey, the two leading figures of the Eichmann-*Sonderkommando,* to reassure them, the situation remained uncertain. The appointment of the temporary Jewish Council did not set their minds at rest. The Jews did not know whether they were responsible to the new Hungarian government or to the Germans. This was a critical period during which the Germans and their Hungarian allies prepared the tools for the death machine. As a result of the total prohibition against Jewish travel, and especially because of the mass arrests at the railway stations from the very first day, there was a complete break in communication between the capital and the countryside.

According to Kasztner, the first contact made by him and Brand with the SS did not take place until the beginning of April. Everyone was in a state of shock and no one knew what to do, a situation further heightened by the continued mass arrests even of ordinary passersby, who held no public posts. Panic and fright prevailed among the Jews. The first reaction of shock was followed by a state of paralysis.

Those circles which served the purposes of the conquest lost no time, however, and they took decisive action. Reference will be made here to the major actions only, some of which were at the time already known to the general public.

The first change, which without exaggeration may be termed fateful, was the appointment of László Baky as State Secretary in the Ministry of the Interior on March 24, two days after the establishment of the new government. A few days thereafter, on March 28, László Endre was named to a similar position. The government decision requiring all Jews to wear the Yellow badge was taken on March 29, and went into effect on April 5. In Munkács (Mukačevo) the requirement was reportedly in force on March 23. More significant than anything else, however, was the decree that declared Carpatho-Ruthenia and Transylvania military regions. At the time, this measure aroused little suspicion or fear. In fact, the security status of these areas served as justification for the deportations to Auschwitz. During this period, the first three weeks of the German occupation,

Jews were removed from all practice of the independent professions, their bank accounts were frozen, and they were forbidden to engage Aryan household help. The Hungarian Gestapo was formed at this time.[6]

In the middle of April ghettoization began in Carpatho-Ruthenia and northeastern Hungary. In mid-May the deportations began. They were suspended on orders from Horthy, as previously noted, at the beginning of July. In other European lands, this process had been carried out gradually over a period of at least two or three years. The annihilation of the Jews of Hungary was executed at an unprecedented pace, with the decisive and brutal participation of the local elements.

CHAPTER 5

THE GERMAN OCCUPATION BEGINS

As has been pointed out, the two principal features which marked the youth movements in Hungary at the beginning of 1944 were the open renewal of movement activity, and the mounting fears for the future of Hungarian Jewry—fears which were fed by the refugees arriving from Poland. The number of members increased and new branches were opened in provincial towns, but the youth movements nevertheless remained small for the most part, lacking in influence on the Jewish community and on its official leadership.

Any significant activity in the Resistance remained within the framework of the individual movement. Almost all of the youth groups included both local members and refugees from Slovakia and Poland. These components played various roles in the different movements, and their importance varied from movement to movement.

In *Hashomer Hatzair* and *Maccabi Hatzair* the members from Slovakia were more prominent and, as has already been noted, they assumed effective leadership. Polish Jews were almost completely absent from *Maccabi Hatzair;* their number in *Hashomer Hatzair* was very small, and they took no part in determining activities. Though the number of Polish refugees in *Dror* was relatively small, they helped influence decisions, and together with their colleagues from Carpatho-Ruthenia they constituted the leadership of the movement. By this time the merger had already taken

place between *Dror* and *Habonim,* the latter having many members from northern Transylvania. From 1942 on there was full cooperation between *Maccabi Hatzair* and *Dror-Habonim.* Beginning early in 1944 the relations between these movements and *Hashomer Hatzair* improved considerably, and they achieved a close working relationship so that they were in effect a single united body within the Resistance. The largest group of Polish youth were in *Hanoar Hatzioni.* There were no Slovakian members at all.

The situation in *Bnai Akiva* was completely different. The dominant personality up to the beginning of 1944 was Meir Kahani, who represented that movement and its senior group, *Hehalutz Hamizrahi,* in the national circles of *Misrahi* as well as in the intermovement bodies. Following his *aliyah* to Palestine, younger members were chosen to the leadership in his stead, but they found it difficult to fill his place, especially under the difficult conditions created by the invasion. Besides, the refugees had not been as well integrated into *Bnai Akiva* as into the other movements, and many returned or sought to return to Slovakia when the invasion came. Because there was no decisive leadership, as in the other movements, *Bnai Akiva* lacked a direct contact with the Resistance *mifkada,* or headquarters. Dov Abramczik, a *Bnai Akiva* member from Poland, served on the central body, but he was regarded as a co-opted member, rather than as an official representative of his movement.

Betar, which was not associated with the *mifkada* of the Halutz movements, carried on its own activities, similar to those of the other organizations. At a later date a cooperative working relationship was set up for specific practical undertakings. The Slovakian influence was considerable here.[1]

Since Jews were forbidden to travel by rail, all contact with the provincial towns was cut off, and the leadership of the movements remained in the hands of those who were in Budapest. Some of these sought to rejoin their families in other parts of Hungary, but few succeeded. Many were caught and were among the first to be shipped to Auschwitz.

During the first days after March 19, only a few dozen members of each movement were in Budapest, for a total of several hundred in all.[2] The refugees' situation was not worsened to any great extent by the change in the political circumstances. They were already underground. Many of them, and especially those from Slovakia, who spoke Hungarian with reasonable fluency, possessed papers—procured by their colleagues in the

movement—which identified them as local Jews. Their situation was therefore no more secure than that of any Hungarian Jew. As for the Polish refugees, they were technically affected by the abolition of the official Polish Committee, which had provided many of them with legal status. Nevertheless, the local police permitted most of them to continue to enjoy their special position.

The central contact for all the youth movements was the *Haganah* Committee which had been set up on the initiative of the Istanbul delegation before the German invasion. Although this Committee was sometimes called the headquarters, this term is apt to be misleading. It had no independent authority, but served rather as a coordinating body between the movements. An attempt to transform it into a decisionmaking agency, with authority over the youth groups, failed at the very beginning. It presided over a wide variety of activities, constituting "defense" in the broadest possible sense. These activities included false documents, bunkers and arms, and the *tiyul* which at this stage had no clear destination.

Although the refugees exercised a very great direct influence on the organizational steps taken, and even more on the atmosphere and on the policies adopted within the Halutz movements, these bodies were completely unprepared for the utterly new conditions created by the occupation. To be sure, there was a difference between them and other sections of the Jewish population. In the early days of the German arrival this difference found expression in various ways which were to be even more marked in the future. The members were young and for the most part unmarried, and therefore able to adapt themselves without any great difficulty to sudden changes in residence or style of life. In addition, their mutual obligations as movement members created more than one frame of reference for collective responsibility. Furthermore, as active Zionists and idealists, they were not fettered by the psychological or ethical limitations of any sense of deep solidarity with the Hungarian nation and its laws. Finally, and perhaps most decisively, the refugees within the youth movements had succeeded in instilling a foreboding of sheer danger. Even more, they became the principal group influencing attitudes, and were thereby in a position to dictate, perhaps unconsciously, both thought processes and patterns of behavior.

The first Resistance activity after the German invasion was concentrated almost exclusively in Budapest. Efforts by the movements to

organize in the outlying towns were very weak, and did not succeed in creating any permanent operation. There were many causes: the weakness of the movements, the speed at which events were occurring, the lack of cooperation from the leadership of the local Jewish communities, and the open hostility of the majority of the non-Jewish population. The first activities in Budapest were those which appeared to offer greater promise to save the lives of their colleagues. The only means at their disposal were what they created themselves, and for their own use. This constraint prescribed the first steps taken, although, as will be seen, the movements were at no time completely detached from the official bodies, and especially not from the members of the Relief and Rescue Committee.

The immediate concern was to assure the personal security of the members of the movements. There was urgent need both to provide Aryan certificates for all who might reasonably be expected to benefit from them and to prepare hiding places for those for whom documents would be of little avail. Some tentative and preliminary steps in these directions had already been taken immediately after the abrupt change in conditions.[3] One great advantage of the movements, which brought about relatively rapid results, was the simple fact that they already had some experience in everything that had to be done. The difference was primarily in dimension. Several hundred refugees, who had already learned to live underground—that is to say under borrowed identities—were now joined by another few hundred Hungarian Jewish youth.

During this period some of the refugees from Slovakia began to return there by the same paths they had taken a year or two earlier. This move was termed a re-*tiyul.* Mention must also be made of another important undertaking, the *tiyul* to Romania, details on which will follow. The first person to strike off in this direction left Hungary on March 20.

Because there was no uniformity in the rate at which the movements reacted, it is difficult to define clear and specific periods. It can be stated that the pace of activity was unremitting. The immediate and pressing need to assure physical existence, and to enable the leading personalities of all the movements in Budapest to take appropriate action, led to the next stage, at least temporarily. This was the attempt to gather most of the movement activists in the capital, and at the same time transfer many members to less dangerous places. The latter was in effect a continuation of the *tiyul* from Slovakia, and led to the first efforts to organize a *tiyul*

to Yugoslavia and Romania. As will be seen, the attempt to get to Yugoslavia—or to be more precise to Serbia—in order to join the Resistance fighting there against the Germans, did not succeed, and only the *tiyul* to Romania provided an actual solution. Romania as a destination offered several advantages over the Yugoslavian alternative, the most important of which was that there were then no deportations from there. Indeed, a limited *tiyul* was even taking place during this period.

The acquisition of arms, and training in their use, was one of the points into the action program of the *Haganah* Committee, but at this juncture little was yet being done in this field. The use of weapons was secondary in importance to the activites described above.

The *mifkada* in Budapest sought to centralize all the activities of the various movements, and especially during the first period the preparation of documents, but the movements continued in effect to operate independently. There was a degree of cooperation between them, which included exchange of documents and information on technical matters. In March 1944, all contact with the delegation in Istanbul was cut off. Communications were reestablished later with both Istanbul and Geneva, but the representatives of the *Yishuv* were no longer able to guide and advise the Resistance, as previously.[4]

There is no point in comparing the activity of the Halutz movements in Hungary with those in Eastern Europe. There was no expectation whatever, not even on the part of the youth groups themselves, that the Halutz movements would become one of the principal elements in the life of Hungarian Jewry. Their ideas and their social composition made them completely alien to the character of Hungarian Jews.

Menahem Klein, of *Maccabi Hatzair,* together with his friend Vicki Fischer (Reshef), were among the first to engage in the manufacture of documents. Even before March 1944, they had obtained their first blank forms for the forged certificates. Hansi Brand had procured them from the owner of a printing press. They already had skills in the technical and in the procedural aspects of this delicate work, and the experience they had gained in preparing documents for the refugees from Slovakia now stood them in good stead. They were themselves refugees. These early beginnings ultimately developed into a central workshop which produced documents for all the movements. This subejct will be dealt with in greater detail later.

Another source of false documents was the group of experienced Poles from *Hanoar Hatzioni.* One of their senior members taught the art of forging Aryan documents and the official stamp, to two members of the movement who showed a talent for graphics. These two were holed up in a room on Andrássy Boulevard, and one of the members served as contact.

Their "clients" included not just the members of the immediate group, but a large number of other Polish refugees, as well as members of Hungarian movements. A Jew by the name of Schersky was in constant and close touch with the members of the group. He met with them almost daily and distributed the papers among the older refugees from Poland who had no other organizational affiliations. In this, as in other areas, the Poles enjoyed a priority since they were of very great help in training the local youth. In a number of cases they also distributed original Polish documents. In this way Moshe (Pil) Alpan "acquired" Polish citizenship for a while, and possessed a permit to remain in Hungary as a refugee. This obliged him to learn at least a few words of Polish, which was relatively easy for speakers of a Slavic language. Fortunately for him, the Hungarian police did not detect the fine difference.[5]

In the period preceding the occupation most of the documents carried by the refugees were actually authentic certificates issued by the Hungarian authorities. Similar certificates continued to be obtained in the same manner even after March 19. Indeed, this remained the primary source. So long as the matter involved only some dozens, or even a few hundred cases, this was still possible. Toward the end of April the members of the movements descended on the offices of the Ministry of the Interior and obtained birth certificates in the manner previously described. Many Hungarians were also seeking evidence of their Aryanism, and the presence of the Jews among the crowds in the Interior offices attracted no attention.

There were also a few cases in which such credentials had been prepared even before the occupation, so that with the mounting danger they were available for use. The supply was of course far short of what was required to meet the rapidly growing needs. No one had foreseen the need to shift all the Hungarian youth movements into the underground, yet this is exactly what they sought to achieve in the weeks immediately after the arrival of the German army.

The thought had already occurred that it would be necessary to extend "Aryanization" not only to those in Budapest, but to all the members in the provincial towns as well. Obviously authentic papers were preferable from every point of view, but there was no hope of obtaining the large quantities required. Besides, experience had already demonstrated that one set of documents was not sufficient. Circumstances required the replacement of the papers at fairly frequent intervals. Each certificate, no matter how good, had a relatively short life. This was what made it necessary to shift from small-scale to mass production.

Possession of proper credentials afforded the members a necessary freedom of action, and it therefore became absolutely necessary to find ways of obtaining more forms. In one case, Yitzhak (Mimish) Herbst and a few Polish refugees were able to compel a printer, at the point of a pistol, to prepare a number of blank birth certificate forms. The documents were by no means perfect, but for lack of any alternative, they were used for a while. Luck was with the members of *Hanoar Hatzioni* and *Betar,* on the other hand, and a Jewish printer whose son was a member of a youth group, agreed without any threat to work nights and print forms which they could fill in and distribute.

Printing of the forms was not the end of the problem. There was also the need to add the appropriate official endorsement. Three methods were used to reproduce the stamp. One was to copy it from a sample, using a draftsman's compass and India ink, and many seals were indeed reproduced in this way. A second method was by the use of a special gelatinous material which, when pressed on a genuine stamp, would take on its likeness, and this would then be transferred to the new document. Both methods were slow and the number of reproductions that could be made was limited. According to David Gur (Grosz), one of the "professionals" engaged in this work at the time, the image on the jelly surface could in a short time be reproduced some 20 or 30 times. Thereafter it was absorbed and the lines became blurred. The third method was that brought with them by the refugees from Poland. This was based on the use of a razor blade to cut out a die. In this way the inked stamp could be used to produce prints without limit. The shortcoming of this method was that the product was never an exact reproduction. It bore a very strong resemblance to the original, but was never identical. It certainly could not pass careful scrutiny, not even by an ordinary policeman,

not to speak of a serious investigation and examination. Despite this deficiency, the group from Poland continued to produce and distribute certificates, and to judge from a number of testimonies, they served the purpose for which they were indended.[6]

Among the problems involved in this production were those dealing with the quality of the paper, and typeface and size. Some of the technical problems were even more complicated. For example, the birth certificates bore serial numbers which began anew each year in each of the branches of the vital statistics offices. The first digits of this number indicated the region, and where the certificate had been issued. Each office had not only its own paper and address, but also its own local stamp. It was therefore necessary to diversify the seals, inasmuch as a large number of documents all indicating birth in the same neighborhood of Budapest, for example, would have aroused suspicion.

In most cases, a set of documents included a birth certificate, a paper attesting to place of residence, and a baptiismal certificate. The latter was fairly easy to obtain if the birth certificate was that of a genuine person. If it had been fabricated, however, the baptismal certificate, too, had to be contrived. The first papers were rather poor and frequently defective, but their quality was of secondary importance to the poise and self-confidence of the bearer—who needed boldness. It was always advisable to avoid encounters that might arouse suspicion, yet such meetings did indeed multiply during these times, out of necessity, and were euphemistically referred to as the "stock exchange." The meetings took place almost daily in the vicinity of Budapest's main church, the Basilica, in public gardens, on street corners, or on the steps of museums. At such times the requests for documents were passed on, and the papers in due course delivered. Those engaged in the actual production of the documents had only limited contacts.

Another popular place for the meetings was the community building at 12 Sip Street. Many of those who came there were activists already bearing Aryan identities. Everyone was aware that in additon to the thousands of Jews, the place was swarming with secret police and informers of all kinds. Almost certainly in those early days of underground organization, the activists required more than a small degree of luck to be able to act naturally in their new illegal existence. This was especially true of the local youth, who were embarking on a way of life which was utterly new to them.

While this was going on, many of the Hungarian Jewish youth continued to obey the conscription orders and to enlist, as required by law, in the labor service system. Large numbers acted under the pressure of their families, who rejected the "illegal" alternatives, especially since the labor units were at that time not being sent to the front. It appeared to be relatively less dangerous to enlist and to be law-abidding citizens, despite the German presence. Furthermore, there was a feeling, especially after the deportations began, that the labor service units offered security, since they remained within the country. The youth movements had no clear policy on this matter. In many instances, they recommended that their members obey the enlistment orders, because of problems in the process of "Aryanization," and because they were not certain what to do with youth bearing Aryan certificates, since even the non-Jewish young people were subject to conscription into the Hungarian army. So far as is known, none of the activists in the movements chose this course.[7]

Contact was kept with those who were inducted. They were visited and were supplied with documents which would enable them to flee if that became necessary. Simultaneously there were attempts to set up bunkers and to accumulate weapons, but it was not clear exactly what either of these was for. In most cases, the bunkers were simply hideaways for those lacking other solutions.

The first efforts to acquire arms and to create bunkers had begun even before the German invasion, as noted earlier. Instructions were received from Istanbul to set up the *Haganah* Committee, and at the same time the first pistols were obtained. The major source for the latter was the black market in Budapest. Teleki Square (Teleki tér) was widely known as a center for the sale not only of second-hand goods, but also of all sorts of illegal items. Food ration cards and guns could be acquired there. Most of the weapons came from Hungarian army deserters or from thefts from military arsenals, and were sold to all who were willing to pay the price. It is difficult to say exactly how many firearms the Resistance possessed at this time, but there is no doubt that it could not have been more than a few dozen weapons of various types, and it possessed a limited quantity of ammunition.

The preparation of bunkers was undertaken almost instinctively. More than any other aspect of underground activity, this was preeminently an area of activity by the movements.[8] Where the Polish influence was felt, the bunkers were in greater use than in movements where the Slovakians

held sway. Local youth were in no great hurry to prepare these hideaways. Maintenance of a bunker created all sorts of logistical and communications problems, which the movements outside of Budapest were unable to solve. For all these various reasons, little was done in this direction. It should be noted, however, that the movements did conduct deliberations on the use to which such bunkers had been put in Poland, both as hiding places and as bases for military resistance. These discussions created an awareness of the technical aspects, and this was later put to good use in several places.

During the first stage, most of the bunkers in Budapest were located in apartments, and these constituted home for members who had to all intents and purposes cut off all contact with the outside world. Each bunker had one or two members who were responsible for food and communications. The main justification for hiding was the fact that many of the members did not yet possess suitable papers, or hesitated to use what they had. Some were afraid to walk about in public, even if they had the best of documents, because of what was considered a "Jewish face." To these the bunkers were simply hiding places, and even at that they were not fully secured, and were practical for limited periods only. There were only a few such apartments, because people were unwilling to rent them to the young people. Communication was also difficult. Sometimes a bunker was transformed from a hideaway into a trap for its occupants. In one such case a bunker was occupied by about ten members of the local *Hashomer Hatzair* who were informed on, and all were arrested. As the *Tiyul* began to operate, most of these secret apartments were gradually given up.

The second phase in the creation of bunkers came after the first failures of the *tiyul.* Those who were on a *tiyul* which went amiss and were unable to try again had to be housed somewhere.

One case, quite different from the others, was the *Hanoar Hatzioni* bunker in a cave in the Rózsadomb region. This was a hilly area on a side of Buda which had many such caves. Most of them were well known and were under the supervision of various bodies. In some cases they were even objects of research. One relatively unknown cave, in an area of luxury homes and adjacent to the villa of a Christian engineer, was transformed into a bunker by the *Hanoar Hatzioni* members. Dov Borsodi (Broshi), a member of the movement, struck up a friendship with the

engineer, who revealed his hatred for the Germans and suggested that the cave be converted. His purpose was twofold: to store weapons, and to conceal his personal possessions. He expected the Jews to finance the project and execute it. This was one of the rare occasions when an extreme right wing Hungarian was willing to risk cooperation with the Jews. Appropriate work was done in the cave to adapt it for human residence and attempts were made, with the engineer's help, to insulate the damp walls and strengthen them. For this purpose large quantities of lumber were brought. Supplies of food, water, fuel, blankets, clothing, and liquor were also stockpiled.[9]

Two refugee families and a number of members of the movement took up residence in the cave to ascertain if it would be possible to live there for any prolonged period of time. The cave was enormous, and apparently they never reached all its recesses. There were two entrances to the cave, one of which was located near the engineer's villa, but access was not easy. In order to enter one had to descend about six meters by rope ladder.

Although the movement had succeeded in obtaining the cooperation of the engineer, this was not true of all members of his family. It was necessary to keep an eye on the entrance, and to maintain contact between the occupants of the cave and their colleagues outside. One of the girls in the movement, who was installed as a domestic in the engineer's home for this purpose, told of her part in the episode:

> The food and equipment for the bunker were brought to my room daily. The engineer was aware of all this, and I know that he had a large supply of weapons, some of which he transferred to the bunker. This went on for about three weeks. The *haverim* used to come up at night to get the supplies that had been brought to my room during the day. After about three weeks I learned that the police were keeping an eye on the house . . . . when I was sure there was surveillance I decided to leave.[10]

Mordecai Weisz, who handled the matter from the very beginning and until the members quit the place, told of the ending:

> Fortunately for us, police dogs which had been brought into the cave came across some smoked meat, and with that considered that

> they had achieved their mission. It should be added that with the engineer's help we had received official certificates identifying us as "cave researchers," so that our presence there was legal .... The whole experiment turned out to be an absolute failure. When we took our people out of the cave it became clear that the dampness was unbearable. They became sick, and began to lose their teeth.[11]

Still another bunker was that maintained by *Betar.* It was located in Budapest's Polytechnical University and was also created with outside non-Jewish help. Andi Freiman was the leader of the group, most of whose members came from the movement in the Kassa (Košice) region in the north of Hungary. The refuge was a long and large hollow area, unused, about 120 centimeters high. It had been created between two buildings which had been constructed at different times, and joined together. A Hungarian professor (whose name is unknown because of the death of Andi Freiman, the sole contact), suggested the place to one of his Jewish students. The latter passed word on to the members of *Betar,* and they converted it into a bunker.[12] Large quantities of equipment and food were stored there, but sanitary conditions were problematic. There was also no possibility of moving around during the day, for fear of disclosure. The occupants were able to emerge into the adjoining rooms only at night. The difficulty of getting about within the bunker, because of its height, goes without saying. The place was used primarily to house members who had been apprehended, or had escaped, or were in immediate danger outside, and required a cooling off period. Because of the difficult physical conditions, a stay in the bunker was usually very brief.

In addition to these two relatively large bunkers, each of the movements had its own additional hideaways. In effect, these were hidden apartments in various parts of the capital, especially in thinly populated suburbs. These places served for concealment in time of danger, and stays in them were usually brief. The intention was always to spirit the members away either by *tiyul* or by the "transport"—to be described in the next chapter.

The instinctive urge to create bunkers grew out of a desperate reaction to the suddenly worsened situation, but the move proved no solution

under conditions prevalent in Budapest. Although weapons had been concealed in some of them, the intention had been to utilize these for self-defense in case of catastrophe rather than for any broader military action. Most of the bunkers were discontinued, in part or in whole, at the end of June, about the time of the departure of the "transport." The life span of each was relatively short, and their impact on the development of the Resistance was small at the time. Their vital role was yet to come. Much greater efforts were devoted during this time to restoration of communication with members in the provincial cities, which had been cut off from the capital.

The whole subject of contact with these towns confronts students of the period with extremely difficult and complex problems. As most of the Jews in the outlying towns were deported and liquidated without the possibility of extending any practical help to them, the subject is highly emotionally charged with feelings of frustration and guilt on the part of both those who were unable to come to the rescue, and those who were deported and somehow remained alive. Very few eyewitnesses have survived, and the information available is fragmentary.

The major question of concern here is the nature and character of the contacts between Budapest and the various provincial cities, and the practical results which ensued in terms of rescue of Jews. There is almost no doubt that in the first weeks, approximately the beginning of the ghettoization, there was practically no communication between the center and the countryside. As noted earlier, some members of the movement who lived in Budapest returned to their families in provincial towns immediately after the arrival of the Germans. This did not constitute a two-way communication, however. Furthermore, this was contrary to the official policy of the movements, which urged that Jews remain in the capital. Those who returned nevertheless did so out of a sense of responsibility toward their families. *Bnai Akiva* was particularly affected by these departures because most of its members came from small towns in northern and eastern Hungary.[13]

The ban on Jewish travel by railroad throughout Nazi-occupied Europe disrupted any effective reaction. This prohibition also prepared the ground for the liquidation of the Jews in Hungary's provincial towns. In addition, any possible rescue operations were hampered by the unconcealed hostility of the majority of non-Jews; the fact that in the villages and small

towns--and in Hungary all cities were small except for Budapest--everyone was known; and family ties, which made it difficult for the young people to flee to the unknowns of Budapest. Above all was the simple lack of time. Before Hungarian Jewry had opportunity to recover from the shock of the German conquest and to organize a resistance movement, the roundup of Jews had already begun.

The youth movements in the small towns were unable to react independently. Their situation was particularly acute, and they had neither the experience nor the leadership which existed in Budapest. The long prohibition against any activity by the movements, which had been lifted only in December 1943, had left its mark. The greatest handicap of all was the absence of those in their early twenties, who had been drafted into the labor service system. There were some early efforts to construct bunkers in the countryside, but so far as is known these were never used. It must be kept in mind that information is scanty, and it is possible that there were additional attempts which have remained unknown.

One of the first activities after the organization of the Jewish Council in Budapest was the establishment a special department, under its auspices, to maintain contact with the other towns. This department (*Vidéki Osztály*) was a typical phenomenon of the period. It was composed entirely of senior Zionists and was located in the community building, where heretofore the Zionists had never set foot. Inasmuch as both the Zionist Organization and the Palestine Office had been closed down, this was in effect the only Zionist center. Those working there came from Zionist groups with widely divergent philosophies, among them Dr. Lajos Gottesmann of the Revisionists, and Moshe Rosenberg of *Hashomer Hatzair.*[14] The very existence of the department was an indication not only of Zionist penetration for the first time into the inner circles of the official Jewish community, but also of an additional accord among the Zionist groups themselves. As of March 19, Gottesmann was included in all consultations held by Kasztner. Between March and June there was no real difference between the Zionist leadership, in which a Revisionist representative participated, and the Relief and Rescue Committee in whose name Kasztner operated.

The department in effect served as the focal point for the concentration of information on what was occurring outside the capital. Since Jews could not travel, such intelligence came only through letters or by

telephone, and the process of gathering the news took at least two or three weeks. As a result, the full picture, indicating that the persecutions in the countryside were more severe and more rapid than in Budapest itself, became clear only after the new policies had already been put into effect. This explains why, in addition to the difficulties of initial organization in Budapest, the rescue work in the provincial towns did not begin before the middle of April.

From a practical point of view the department in Budapest could do little more than receive the information and pass it on to a number of Zionist activists. Dr. Gottesmann recalled that he prepared a daily information bulletin in ten or twelve copies which he circulated among Ottó Komoly and the Zionist leadership. Only the active youth members were able to establish actual contact with the other towns, and extend some degree of help, and this, of course, in illegal ways. A clearer picture of the situation emerges from the evidence submitted by the members of the Resistance in Budapest and in the field. A typical description of what went on among the young people in one of the important Jewish communities is to be found in the report of Yehuda Levi (Pici), an activist of *Hanoar Hatzioni* in Kolozsvár (Cluj).

> Around the beginning or the middle of April we were at our wit's end what to do . . . . The procedure was already known; the Jews would be gathered together in certain places, and thereafter it was almost certain that they would begin to move them, though we did not know where . . . . Our first concern was how to save ourselves. We could not picture ourselves, young people, being locked up anywhere without making some effort to escape, . . . we had no idea how to go about it. Contact with the outside was cut off. It was already out of the question to get away . . . . We felt that somehow we had to rely on ourselves, and do whatever we could. To begin with we considered digging bunkers. We could not fight, but we could certainly try to hide . . . . At any rate, this plan was not realized . . . . We were told that we would be endangering all the Jews, and not just ourselves . . . . At this time a girl came from Budapest, an emissary. She was from *Dror-Habonim,* and I recall only her first name, Hannah. She had a bunch of blank forms in which the personal details could be inserted so that the bearers

> would "become Christians" . . . . I managed to get the use of my employer's flat, and there we prepared the papers for those of our colleagues who had to "disappear." . . . . I don't know exactly how many documents she brought, but I would estimate we got about forty . . . . To our regret some of our members did not agree . . . . "Disappearance" meant severing all contact with the family. They regarded this as abandoning their kinfolk, and it required a cold-blooded reasoning, free of sentiment, to leave them all and flee. We could certainly understand if one of us refused to be extricated.[15]

The girl referred to was Hannah Ganz (Grünfeld) who reconfirmed her collaboration with Pici. Before her trip to Kolozsvár she had been engaged in preparing a bunker in Budapest, together with Neshka Goldfarb, and had been sent by her movement to seek a way to organize passage to Romania. The encounter emphasized a trend in the activity of the Resistance, at least in two aspects. For one, even at this early period, the aim was to assure freedom of movement to enable the young people to function, without the construction of bunkers. Secondly, the divisions between the movements had to be eliminated, or at least minimalized so as not to interfere with any possible rescue work. It became clear beyond any doubt during the first few weeks that the only possible rescue effort was to bring a number of people to Budapest. The inability to go by train, and the lack of sufficient Aryan papers, especially at the outset, were formidable obstacles to implementation of such plans.

Local initiative which sought to overcome the ban on travel was reported by Efra Agmon of *Hashomer Hatzair.*[16] At the beginning of 1944, after the youth movements had received legal status, he had been sent to Munkács to reorganize the local chapter of his movement, and he was there when the invasion came. This section of Carpatho-Ruthenia, close to the border, had a dense Jewish population with about 20,000 in Munkács alone. Jews were not the only ones affected by the prohibition against travel out of this region. There was no possibility of bringing members of the movements to Budapest until the age level for those conscripted into the labor service units was lowered. Many of these Efra Agmon among them, used their conscription orders to get to Budapest, but upon arrival did not show up at the reporting station.

Getting the young people to Budapest was not merely a technical problem. The typical reaction of most Jews to the possibility of flight with the help of false documents can be learned from the tale told by Moshe Weisskopf. He reached Miskolc, a city with a large Jewish population in Trianon Hungary, after the Jews had been herded into the ghetto there. He remained in the ghetto for several hours, talked to people who knew him personally, and later reported:

> The situation was terrible. A number of families lived in one room, and had to sit on the floor. They were about to be transferred to the brick factory, which was the last stop before they were loaded into the railroad wagons. . . . I spoke to them in the very midst of this ghetto, told them what was happening in Budapest, and showed them the documents I had brought with me. They were not prepared to stir; they were terrified and confused. They believed that if they obeyed the law nothing could happen to them. There were many young girls among them, not so many boys, and I pleaded that they come with me. Nothing doing; they were convinced that all this would pass.[17]

Such evidence may be regarded as a solitary account, but each such report does typify the general situation. David Grünwald (Coca) was an active worker in *Hanoar Hatzioni* whose parents, like many of the others, lived in a small village near Nyiregyháza. He relates:

> On March 19 I tried to leave Budapest but was arrested in the railroad station and spent a week in jail. Our principal task in early April was to try to get our comrades out of the small towns. Members were sent to Munkács, but were arrested and we could not save them . . . . I got Aryan papers from Shimon Levi and went to my parents, seeking to rescue them. There I witnessed something that was typical of Hungarian Jews. My parents were unwilling to do anything illegal, and were upset that the Polish refugees had led me astray . . . . Together with them I went to the Nyiregyháza ghetto . . . . A colleague brought documents to us in the ghetto, but even then my parents refused to use them, and my mother forbade me to take flight. Finally I got conscription orders for the labor

> service system, and that is how I left the ghetto. The movement advised me in the meantime to sign up and maintain contact.[18]

Still another report came from Dés (Dej) in northern Transylvania:

> The Jews of Dés were witnesses, like me, to all that was going on, but nevertheless did not want to leave. They said: 'We shall share the fate of all our people.' Only a few young people were prepared to accept the documents and the money which I had brought, and a few days later they did indeed show up in Budapest.[19]

Efra Agmon, of *Hashomer Hatzair,* told of the dispatch of members to the provincial towns:

> The Halutz youth were requested to send emissaries to the various districts on behalf of our Council [*Hashomer Hatzair*]. There were 12 of them; I don't recall all the names. Esther Shechter was sent to Kisvárda, and was caught at the railroad station. She was tortured terribly. She was taken to a transit camp and from there to Auschwitz. We were unable to get her out. . . . Moshe Rosenberg instructed us, and gave each one 15,000 *pengős* to cover the needs of our preparation. . . . Several members were apprehended while en route or at the station. . . . I was sent to Mátészalka . . . and spoke to one of the leaders of the local Jewish council. He was a mature person, intelligent, and of deliberate judgment. He did not dare do anything. . . . It was clear to him that rescue of the Jews in the small towns was an impossible mission.[20]

On the other hand, Efra and his colleagues succeeded in bringing a number of Halutzim to Budapest. Dov Broshi of *Hanoar Hatzioni,* which had sent ten or twelve persons to the counties, reported on the same theme.[21]

Zvi Goldfarb mentions two towns:

> We sent Josef Gárdos to Munkács. He reached the ghetto and succeeded in establishing contact with our members. He brought false documents and a little money for them. He advised them to ignore

> decrees, to leave the ghetto, to hide or flee to Budapest where something could still be done to help them. A small number did indeed arrive from Munkács, but the majority remained. Their parents did not permit their children to leave. 'Wherever we are taken they will take you too,' they said. We sent emissaries also to Huszt (Chust), but only a handful came from there.[22]

Hannah Ganz told that she was threatened unless she stopped spreading horror stories. Avraham Izbitzki, originally from Poland, and one of the active members of the *tiyulim* committee, wrote to Joel and Hansi Brand, affirming that before he had moved on to Romania in one of the first *tiyulim,* he had personally warned public figures in nothern Transylvania about the deportations.[23] These are but a few examples among the considerable evidence available. Nothing is known of dozens of other such cases. No one remained alive, including those who had been sent to effect the rescue.

Aside from a few scattered instances, what can be said about the efforts to set up contact with the provincial towns in the period between the beginning or middle of April, and the actual deportations? It is clear that the movements sent their representatives to the smaller cities three weeks or a month after the invasion. At this time, or a few days thereafter, the *tiyul* project began, and this too required organizational strength and mobile manpower. The personnel involved had to have not only good documents, but a spirit of daring and sufficient self-confidence to use these powers in their journeys to provincial towns. It is difficult to determine which of the two operations received priority, if either. In those cases where the efforts to establish contact and to organize escape routes were carried on simultaneously, as in Dés or in Kolozsvár, the results were very meager. As noted, these activities could not get under way until the activists in Budapest were able to organize, determine their course of action, and most important create Aryan identification papers, both for themselves and for their colleagues in the provinces. Without these, what was the point of endangering the lives of members, and especially of girls inexperienced in the Resistance? Hungarian Jewry, and this included also the Halutz Resistance, failed to make any effective use of the first three weeks, and this, of course, was a major fault which could not be corrected.

According to available information, only a few dozen went out on this undertaking. They were all very young, and most were girls. Considering the strength, scope, and actual abilities of the movements at this time, this was a major undertaking. Relative to the needs and the problems of hundreds of thousands of Jews in the many cities, these missions were but a drop in the ocean. Instructions were clear and identical in all the movements. First of all, the emissaries were to offer the documents to members of their own movement, next to members of other Halutz movements, and then to other young people who could be considered trustworthy. It should not be forgotten that at this early stage of the Resistance, there was a very deep fear that one careless step could result in destruction of the whole enterprise. During the second stage, about the time of the first deportations in May 1944, the papers were offered to almost anyone. At any rate, around the middle of May the problem became not a shortage of documents but a lack of enough people ready to use them. In many cases, not all the identification papers smuggled into a particular ghetto were used.

How can this phenomenon be explained? As the evidence clearly reveals a great many members of the movements could not assume the moral responsibility of forsaking their families. Those who did not believe the warnings, and this included the majority of the Jews, could not see the logic of breaking up a family precisely during its hour of need. Even members of the movements who had been influenced by the refugees, and therefore foresaw what was to be expected, were not always ready to abandon parents and younger brothers and sisters to their fate, even when it was quite clear to them that the entire family might perish.

The second objective of all the missions was to alert the communities and the local leadership to the danger of the deportations. In this matter too, the evidence available is almost unanimous. No one wanted to listen or pay heed. Some of the youth were even warned that if they continued to spread panic and create confusion, they would be handed over to the police. It should hardly be cause for suprise that well-established Jews were not prepared to listen to the stories of some young "spirit" of 17 or 20, when the reputable leadership of the entire Jewish community was announcing in the official press that no harm would come to anyone if they would only maintain law and order. They could not imagine that the Jewish press was being censored, and at times its contents even dictated by

the Gestapo. Practically every Hungarian Jew was convinced that Regent Horthy would not abandon "his Jews" to deportation and destruction, especially at a time when the Red Army was so close to the Carpathians. This reaction was the inevitable result of historical processes in operation. There is no doubt that Hungarian Jewry erred with regard to both the honesty and the statesmanship of the head of state. This mistake began not in March 1944, but back in the 1920s, when the gap first appeared between the actual status and the position which the Jews deluded themselves into believing they actually occupied.

On balance, the program of contact with the provincial towns may be credited with sending some hundreds of members of the movement to Budapest, and for most of them this was rescue. This also strengthened the movements, and many of these individuals later played key roles in the Resistance. With regard to the broader effect, however, the attempt to warn the entire Jewish population was a complete failure, although the activity may have had some influence somewhere. As will be seen, many Jews from nothern Transylvania did flee southward on their own initiative, and crossed the border into Romania. There were also reports of some scattered Jews who got to Budapest, but there is no way of determining that this was a result of the warnings from the Resistance.

The members of the Halutz Resistance were not the only ones in Hungary who utilized false documents and lived in the underground. Many Jews did this on their own initiative, or with the help of Gentile friends. Despite the generalizations with regard to the reaction of the Hungarian government and Hungarian society, many cases are known of individual rescues. It would appear that thousands of Jews lived in concealment, or carried on thanks to Aryan papers. What distinguished the activities of the Resistance was that these were carried out by an organized body on the basis of the collective responsibility of the members for one another, as well as the creation of a stable mechanism, rather than merely as a series of one-time undertakings. This was what constituted the significance of the Resistance from the very beginning.

In their letter to Istanbul on May 19, after a prolonged break in the contact, Rafi Benshalom and Peretz Révész summarized the organization period: "The work was not new to us. . . . The influence of the refugees was clearly reflected, the educational programs within the local movements were intensive, and the members reacted quickly, correctly, and without hesitation. Our influence increased in wider circles as well."[24]

This description was perhaps exaggerated. Matters were not quite so simple, and the report may be accepted as accurate only in contrast to the reaction of the general Jewish population. Taking up life in the underground was by no means smooth and easy. Many members of the movement continued to live with their families in neighborhoods where they were known, so that they were compelled to wear the Yellow Badge, at least when they returned home. This was a time of first beginnings, a time of search for solutions and of partial resolutions. Most of the effort revolved around the axis which Moshe Alpan termed "the building of cadres." The structural establishment of the Resistance at this juncture dealt almost exclusively with itself, with its members and with those closest to them. Except for the warnings they sought to pass on to the Jews outside of Budapest, certainly no one thought of "rescue of Hungarian Jewry" as a mission to be undertaken by the Halutz movements. They could hardly be expected to foresee that less than two months remained for carrying out such a program. Not even the refugees were able to sound the alarm with regard to something that had not happened previously anywhere else—the beginning of deportations less than two months after the German occupation.

CHAPTER 6

THE TIYUL

Even before the German occupation some thought and consideration had been given to the possibility of rescue operations in both directions across the Transylvanian border. For example, in late 1942 or early 1943, activists in Romania took the initiative in exploring the possibility of capitalizing on the relative calm in Hungary. A limited attempt in a different direction was made at the end of 1943 when, on Istanbul's urging, daring plans were made to organize ships from Romania, a measure calculated to encourage the movement of refugees out of Hungary. The German invasion put an end to these plans, but the contacts made at the time did, to a degree, facilitate the operation of the *tiyul* which began soon thereafter.[1]

Major points of departure for the *tiyul* from Hungary were the cities of Kolozsvár, Nagyvárad (Oradea) and Békéscsaba. The shortest route led from Kolozsvár to Turda (Torda), in Romania, but the topographical conditions were rugged. The road from the other two cities led across the border in the direction of Arad. In additon to these two central points there were many border villages on both sides. The nighttime crossing was always done on foot through cultivated fields, usually under the guidance of local smugglers—peasants who were well acquainted with both sides of the new border, which had been established in 1940.

Money was the sole concern of most smugglers, and there were instances of extortion and fraud, especially when the deportations began from this region. On the other hand, there were also some peasants among them from the Christian Sabbatarian sect, who participated in this work out of a sense of religious belief, and carried out their mission with extraordinary devotion.

The first to go on the *tiyul* across the border to Romania was apparently a member of *Hashomer Hatzair* who deserted his labor service unit, which was due to be shipped to the Ukraine. The crossing had been worked out in advance, even before the German invasion, with the help of Kasztner, who saw to it that the fugitive received all necessary help in Kolozsvár from a local Zionist leader, Ernő Marton, among others.[2]

The *tiyul* to Romania had long been among the possibilities considered earlier by the Resistance leadership, and the first crossing was therefore regarded as something of a tryout. The leaders of the movement waited for two or three weeks to ascertain what had happened before they sought to organize additional groups. Such organization was delayed by the danger of travel by train, lack of information from Romania, and the need to complete the process of "Aryanizing" all members of the movement. Apparently the *tiyul* did not appear urgent enough at this time to warrant giving it any top priority.

The activists in Budapest claimed that the delay in launching the *tiyul* was caused by their lack of contact with the Resistance in Romania and their unfamiliarity with conditions there. Rafi Benshalom and Peretz Révész wrote to Istanbul on May 19: "We received no tidings from them . . . and we therefore delayed sending people. Only much later did we learn from our members who wrote us from there that there were also possibilities of *aliyah.* We are now sending members on *aliyah* in their turn." *Aliyah* "in turn" was the accepted method of the Halutz movements when the reference was to legal, properly organized immigration to Palestine. They wrote further that cooperation between the movements was extensive and good. If there were occasional problems, they were the result of technical matters rather than of policy differences.

In another letter, dated July 31, 1944, signed by the two members and Zvi Goldfarb, they expressed their bitter complaints against the people in Istanbul: "Many months before March 19 we asked you for information and for addresses in Romania. If these had reached us we could have

commenced the *tiyul* much earlier and could have saved ourselves much toil."[3] There is no doubt that the lack of intelligence was a delaying factor in the development of the *tiyul* activities, but it does not appear that this was the major reason, and certainly not the only one.

Nevertheless, occasional *tiyulim* were organized by Halutz movements during the first weeks after the occupation. Four members of *Dror-Habonim* reached Turda as early as March 22 or 23. Another *tiyul* reached there a few days later.[4] All these efforts by *Hashomer Hatzair* and by *Dror-Habonim* were marked by lack of experience in setting up a mechanism and in assuring continuity.

Simultaneously with the beginning of the *tiyul* through Nagyvárad, a local group of *Dror-Habonim* members in Kolozsvár also began to arrange a *tiyul.*[5] The initiative came from the Relief and Rescue Committee or from the leadership of the movement in Budapest. They took care of the financing and also sent the people to the border. The locals handled the actual crossing. Baruch Robinson, a member of the *Maccabi Hatzair* from Slovakia, come to the border to receive the people. Most of the false documents had been prepared in the capital, and the remainder locally. In this case advantage was taken of the contact established with Aryeh Hirsch (Eldar) in Turda even before the invasion, and that provided a certain assurance that the escapees would get help on the other side.

This effort is the only one known in which local activists from a movement, rather than the leadership, took part in organizing a *tiyul.* In all the other known instances, both the initiative and the organization came from the central office of the Resistance in Budapest. This local group continued to operate until the end of April. The two organizers then suspected that the authorities were on their trail, and crossed into Romania themselves. The person sent from headquarters returned to Budapest. During a period of a little more than a month, about 20 or 25 persons crossed safely into Romania.

These, then, were the modest beginnings of the rescue operations from Hungary to Romania in March and April 1944. During this time the Jews of Hungary were confused yet optimistic because of the Hungarian government's attitude up to that point and the approach of the Red Army across the Carpathians. The members of the Halutz Resistance had no feeling of immediate danger either. In all known cases, those who left were refugees, most of them from Poland. It is reasonable to assume

that up to the beginning or middle of May none of the local members of the movements, and none of the local Jews from northern Transylvania, crossed over into Romania.

The first to set up a more or less stable *tiyul* apparatus during the early part of this period seem to have been the members of *Hanoar Hatzioni* from Będzin, who had arrived from Poland less than a year earlier. Until March most of the members of this group were centered in Mohács, from where they hoped to join Tito's partisans—an attempt that did not succeed.

The rumor that there were possibilities of *aliyah* from Romania was received at about this time. One of the members of the group was sent to Kolozsvár even before March 1944 to try to organize a *tiyul* to Romania. His attempt to establish a liaison with the local Zionist leadership failed; the two sides apparently had no common language. This was but an additional example of the difficulties in communication between the refugees and the local leadership. The only prospect that seemed practical was the limited but legal *aliyah* from Budapest, and in this manner a number of members of the group did indeed get to Palestine at the beginning of 1944. The members of *Hanoar Hatzioni* did not abandon the idea of trying to reach Romania.

The group's sojourn in the south of Hungary was cut short by an unexpected occurrence. Immediately after the German occupation, the members in Mohács discovered that one of the SS men there was known to them from Będzin. They tried to kill him, but he disappeared. At the same time a man was found who had handed Jews over to the Gestapo in Poland. They succeeded in doing away with him, but three members of the group were caught and tried. The remaining members of the group returned safely to Budapest. Those captured were grilled by the Germans and were severely tortured for 20 days, following which they were sentenced to death. The death sentence was not carried out, however, and they remained incarcerated in the prison in Pécs.[6]

When they arrived in the capital it became clear that conditions were developing exactly as they had feared, and in a manner so familiar to them from their experience in Poland. As a result the idea was again projected of rescuing oppressed Jews by sending them across the border to calm and relatively secure Romania.

The situation of the Halutzim from Poland at this time was peculiar. They still enjoyed legal status, and in effect could have continued their

existence as Polish Aryan refugees. Three of their number were in prison, however, with a death sentence hanging over them. Under these circumstances it was decided to begin a *tiyul* to Romania, by stages. Some of the leading members were to remain in Hungary to organize the *tiyul* and to maintain permanent contact with the three prisoners—and if possible to free them. The first step in arranging for the *tiyul* to Romania was taken by Pinek, who moved to Nagyvárad for that purpose. With the help of local smugglers he succeeded in establishing a more or less stable and organized route with a communication system.

Promotion of the *tiyul* now took central place. It was more complex than previously thought. To begin with, one individual was designated to remain in Nagyvárad and serve as liaison with the smugglers. At first this was Pinek. A second group of Resistance members in Budapest provided the prospective escapees with Aryan documents and sent them to the border. Since precise information was not available as to what was happening on the other side, Pinek would cross over to Arad to check on the reception of the refugees. Two Polish refugees on the other side, Manus Diamant and Zelig Bayuk, took over responsibility there and remained at their posts until their arrest at the end of May.

The Polish refugees, whose instincts had already been sharpened, had an unmistakeable influence on the first *tiyulim,* and it was not by chance, therefore, that those movements which included a number of these refugees were the first act. Those movements which were more subject to influence of refugees from Slovakia were occupied at this time primarily with organization of the re-*tiyul,* and with the return home of the provincial town members. Record is found of an unsuccessful *tiyul* attempted by the *Bnai Akiva* movement at the beginning or middle of May. It could well be that the information available is only partial since the two principals who dealt with it, Dov Abramczik and Josef Kuperstein, died in the Holocaust. No one knows why this attempt failed, and it could be that there were other *tiyulim* about which nothing at all is known today. As for the *Betar* movement, no trace is to be found of any organized *tiyulim,* either at the beginning of this period or later. Conceivably members of that body participated in *tiyulim* organized by the Resistance. This is a reasonable possibility inasmuch as they took part in the rescue transport organized by the Relief and Rescue Committee. There were also contacts, though not particularly close, between *Betar* and the other Zionist movements.

Changes took place so rapidly during the first months of the occupation that the Resistance had to accommodate itself to altered conditions from week to week. When the first steps were taken to undertake the *tiyul,* in April, ghettoization began. This process was completed by the first half of May. During this time negotiations began between the Rescue Committee and Eichmann's officers. At the same time the Halutz Resistance more or less completed its organization, and from May on began to operate as a coordinated body, to the extent that underground conditions made this possible.

Reference has been made to various programs of the movements. The practice of conducting separate activities continued, and change came about only gradually. The question could well be asked: What form did the Halutz Resistance take? Was it a single body, or a loose federation of independent groups? The reply is neither simple nor unequivocal. There is no doubt that by the beginning of May the Resistance was indeed one body, and not a chance assortment of individual resistances. The independent movements of which it consisted were natural frameworks for close friendships, for collective responsibility, and for a deep sense of personal identification on the part of the young people. The encounter of the movements with each other within the Resistance was neither new or casual, but a continuation of acquaintanceships and previous contacts on both the personal and organizational level. The coordinating body was the *Haganah* Committee, whose composition changed from time to time as dictated by grim reality and the personal condition of the individuals. It was fixed, however, that the Committee, or the *mifkada* as it was called, was always composed of four or five members who represented the various movements, one delegate from each except *Betar,* as has been noted.[7]

According to the original program, the joint committee was expected to activate the various movements as required by the specific objectives and the fields of operation. This principle applied also to the budgets, which before March had been a source of contention. Funds were to be earmarked for clearly defined fields of operation, and not to the movements as such. The operational structure of the Resistance was determined not by the plans, however, but by the exigencies of the actual conditions under which the Resistance existed. Personal relationships, acquaintanceships, mutual trust, an all-around readiness to take personal risks in order

to rescue a colleague in distress—these were the elements of which the Resistance was built. As these elements existed within the movement, the Resistance had no need for a prolonged formative period or for designation of cadres, and could operate fairly quickly after any sudden changes in conditions. Any attempt to weaken the structure of the individual movements would have impaired their operation under existing conditions. Yet as the activities of the Resistance broadened out, the distinctions between the movements gradually narrowed, though the individual organizations never disappeared. Not everything was harmoniously idyllic, to be sure, but the cooperation between the various components of the Resistance met the practical needs of the time and the place.

One of the truly important phenomena which preceded and helped pave the way to close cooperation between the movements was the central laboratory for fabrication of documents. During the early stages, when the refugees played the vital role, each movement carried on its rescue activity separately. From the beginning of June, most of the forged certificates distributed among the movements came from one center. This was a vital element in cementing even closer cooperation. In effect, the documents served as the very foundation for all the operations, since the existence of the Resistance and of its members was completely dependent on them. It is not clear if the laboratory came into existence as a creation of the *mifkada,* as a matter of chance, or as a result of the talents of a few members. Perhaps all three elements were involved.

The Resistance maintained an extremely close contact almost on a day-to-day basis with the Relief and Rescue Committee whose principal figures were now Israel Kasztner and Joel Brand. The first meeting of the *mifkada* took place in the Brand family's apartment at the beginning of April, at which time the operational activities of the Resistance were determined. A clear division of tasks between the two bodies was also fixed. The dealings of the Committee with the SS and with Hungarian government authorities were termed the "big line" (*nagy vonal*) to distinguish it from the individual rescue activities of the Resistance, which were called the "little line" (*kis vonal*). The connections between the two "lines" were constant, though not always with full mutual cooperation.

It must be noted that all the activities of the Resistance, including the *tiyul,* were financed from the coffers of the Committee. The principal

sources of these funds were the Zionist delegations in Istanbul and in Geneva. Substantial local sources were found only much later. It is impossible to imagine the implementation of the Resistance's activities without taking into consideration these funds placed at their disposal.[8]

Kasztner, especially at first, would seek to impose his will on the activities of the Resistance. For example, when one of the senior members of *Hashomer Hatzair* was caught by the Germans as he sought to reach Yugoslavia, Kasztner—who was already in the midst of negotiations which he expected to lead to the rescue of Hungarian Jewry—was thereby placed in a very delicate situation. The Germans reacted with great severity to all attempts to join the partisans, but were much less sensitive to efforts to reach Romania, where they were encountering no armed resistance. Kasztner emphatically insisted that the Resistance not undertake activities of this nature which were apt to undermine what he considered a major undertaking. The *Hashomer Hatzair* people refused to accept his orders. In this open conflict all the youth movements stood together against Kasztner, who was supported by the members of the Committee, among them Ernő Szilágyi, considered the adult patron of the movement concerned. As a result of this clash, which took on all the aspects of a generational confrontation, the Resistance made it quite clear that it was not operating under the auspices of the Committee. During this crisis the functional cooperation between the various movements themselves were pulled even closer.

At the same time a relationship of practical reciprocity was established between the Resistance youth and with the members of the Rescue Committee, in which Kasztner's influence was increasing. This was conspicuous in the preparation for one of Kasztner's most widely known undertakings, which was known variously as the "rescue transport," the "Bergen-Belsen transport," or the "train of the prominent ones." Each of the names reflects a value judgment and an emotional attitude toward an event which has stimulated controversy for years.[9]

The tale of the transport actually began during the first meeting which Kasztner and Brand had with Dieter Wisliceny of the SS. This meeting had been arranged by the members of the German counterespionage group which maintained the contact between Istanbul and the Committee. Dr. Schmidt, commander of the group, took part in the meeting. Wislicency was without doubt the most appropriate personality to conduct negotiations

of this nature, even though he had been the one responsible for the deportation of most of the Jews of Slovakia and of Greece. His participation in the extermination was known to Kasztner and to the members of the Hungarian Jewish leadership. It was also known that he had conducted negotiations of this nature with the "Working Group" in Bratislava, and since those talks had begun, the deportations from Slovakia had indeed ceased. Wisliceny also presented letters of recommendation from Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel, which gave cause for great expectations.

The first meeting took place in the residence of Josef (Józsi) Winniger on April 5. In his report Kasztner recorded the words of the Zionist representative as follows:

> Is the Jewish *Kommando* [the SS Department headed by Eichmann prepared, and if so, on what terms:
> a. to spare the lives of the Hungarian Jews?
> b. to refrain from gathering Hungarian Jews in ghettos?
> c. to refrain from deporting Jews out of Hungary?
> d. to permit emigration of Jews out of Hungary with the help of entry permits which will be provided for other countries?[10]

Wislicency gave reassuring replies to the first three questions. As for the fourth, he said that he required guidance from Berlin, but personally he did not believe the Germans would be interested in a small-scale emigration. He asked that a plan be drawn up for emigration of "at least 100,000 Jews."

Events which took place within that very month, and even before the practical preparations for the transport, exposed Wisliceny's replies to the first three questions as being completely untrustworthy. This was not lost on a man as experienced as Kasztner, nor on the leaders of the Halutz Resistance, who were acquainted with the work of the Rescue Committee, though they did not always see eye to eye with it. The question as to whether anyone believed the promises made by Eichmann and his people therefore is superfluous. However, there was controversy over other fields of activity and differences of opinion between the "big line" and the "little line." The two "lines" did often converge, and the matter of the transport was one of these points of agreement.

Wisliceny demanded two million dollars with an additional 10 percent as his commission for continuation of the negotiations. This amount was raised, most of it from the funds of the *Judenrat,* and the remainder from the resources of the Rescue Committee. The discussions were continued, not with Wisliceny, who was supposed to be in Berlin, but with two other officers from Eichmann's department, Hermann Krumey and Otto Hunsche. As a matter of fact, Wislicency was at that very moment engaged in organizing the ghettoization of the Jews of Carpatho-Ruthenia. As a basis for possible emigration, the members of the Committee offered to provide 600 certificates for admission to Palestine, which were available to the Palestine Office in Budapest. This gave the negotiations the character of a Zionist operation, and the Palestine Office, which had the certificates, should have had the authority to determine the list of those leaving with the *aliyah* group. However, this would have been contrary to the broader, all-Jewish nature of the talks with the Germans as well as the community character of the financial sources which made the contact possible.

On May 2 Krumey announced that approval had been received from Berlin for the departure of the 600 certificate holders. He suggested adding immediately another 100 persons to the list, against payment of 10,000,000 *pengős,* even without certificates or other visas. A week earlier the deportations had begun from Kistarcsa detention camp, and word had been received from Slovakia that these deportees were being sent in the direction of Auschwitz.[11]

At this point Eichmann himself presented Brand with the notorious proposal, "Jews for trucks." Since so much has been written about this matter there is no need to repeat the details here. Brand left for Istanbul on May 17, arriving there in order to put the matter before the representatives of the Allies, the Zionist Organization, the Joint, or any other international Jewish body. When it became clear in Budapest that his mission had failed, and that deportation of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz had begun, the Relief and Rescue Committee began to arrange for what became known as the famous Rescue transport.

Up to the middle of May, when the matter of the transport had not yet been raised, it appeared to the Resistance that Kasztner's "big line" was not leading anywhere, even as the deportations continued. Against this background, the Resistance undertook the second and principal

chapter in organization of the *tiyul.* Of the various early attempts to get to Romania, only the *Hanoar Hatzioni* group continued to operate. *Dror-Habonim* sought to set up a local body in Nagyvárad with the help of members from Transylvania who spoke Romanian, but they were caught while trying to sneak documents to the local Jews. After that first miscarriage, another member, Asher Arányi, was sent from Budapest in the middle of April, and he put the local unit on a firm basis.[12] Hannah Ganz (Grünfeld) arrived in Kolozsvár at the same time and for the same purpose. Though both were members of *Dror-Habonim,* their activities were broad and general in nature.

For a month Hannah Ganz traveled twice a week between Kolozsvár and Budapest, escorting persons who were to go on the *tiyul.* In the capital they were provided with Aryan papers to serve them on the trip, and in most cases the documents were placed in their hands only a few hours before their departure. They also had to be advised how to act during the trip, and what they were to do upon reaching Kolozsvár. There was no choice but to make all these arrangements at encounters in public places such as squares or parks. The *tiyul* candidates would meet Hannah Ganz in a street near the station, and would travel in separate railroad cars. In addition to their documents, each one received a sum of money, usually in dollars, for use when they got to Romania. Most of these people had neither the will not the experience to make the trip alone under such circumstances, and certainly were not competent enough to pay the smuggler the amount due him, hence Hannah Ganz would deliver that money herself each time.

These trips served a dual purpose for the Resistance since they made possible the transfer of both people and documents without which those in the provinces could not get to Budapest. At first the papers were for movement members only, but later—and even before the ghetto was established in Kolozsvár—Hannah Ganz sought to reach a wider public. She even contacted the local *Judenrat,* but was firmly turned away. Later, however, the local rabbi himself left for Romania on a *tiyul* with her help. The number of identification documents sent from Budapest in this way was limited to a few hundred at most, but in any event there were not enough takers for either the papers or the opportunity of a *tiyul.*[13]

Hannah Ganz was arrested at the end of May as the result of a typical Resistance mishap. Upon their arrival in Kolozsvár, the fugitives would be

hidden with local farmers, sometimes for a full day. She lodged in a hotel, and her whereabouts were not known to members of the group. On the one occasion when she deviated from this precaution, someone was picked up, and after torture revealed Ganz's address. She was sent to Auschwitz despite all efforts to release her from prison, as described in the next chapter, but she did survive to tell her story.

Arányi continued with his work for only about a month, and was arrested on May 23. The circumstances of the arrest were similar to those of Ganz, but whereas the authorities knew at once that she was Jewish, Arányi succeeded in preserving his "Aryan" identity. He was released after a month of interrogations, still holding his Aryan identity papers. This time bearing the Gestapo stamp of approval. He had succeeded in convincing them that he was a Hungarian student who was helping the Jews just for the money.

Transfer of the false documents created particular difficulty. The usual system practiced by those working at the border was to place the papers between two books, wrap them in a package, and deposit it somewhere not too close to where the people were located. In the event that the parcel was discovered, there would be nothing to connect it with its owners. No instances have been found in which the packages were indeed located. The police were for the most part seeking Jews or deserters from the army, and it sometimes happened that young men were detained on suspicion of such desertion.

The rail trip to Kolozsvár took over 10 hours and was extremely dangerous. Because of air raid alarms, which were an almost daily occurrence in the summer of 1944, the ordeal often lasted longer. Such delays of course disrupted all the planning and the coordination with the smugglers. Sometimes groups were compelled to remain in border towns longer than anticipated. There is no way of knowing the number of victims captured during a *tiyul,* but the number probably ran into the hundreds.

The *tiyul* conducted by *Hanoar Hatzioni* continued to operate during this time, apparently without any connection with the other efforts which were also centered in Nagyvárad. While the deportations were taking place from this city at the end of May, a large company of fugitives was apprehended as a result of carelessness and bad luck. This group had a house which served as temporary quarters in case of need. One evening the party of prospective border crossers which arrived was larger than

could be handled in one night. Some of them left for the border and the others were sent to a house for overnight lodging. The building was listed by the police as abandoned by Jews, and therefore state property. Occupancy was forbidden, and of course there should have been no signs of life there. That evening, during an air raid alarm, one of the neighbors observed that people in the house were not descending to the shelters, as required by law, and he called the police. They came to investigate this violation of the civil defense regulations, but while they were there, about ten ragged and dirty figures appeared out of the gloom. This was the group that had left for the border the previous evening. They had been caught after they had reached Romania but managed to get away and to retrace their steps. Only then did the police suspect an attempted border crossing, and a search of the building revealed forged documents, dollars, and weapons. The gendarmes were convinced they had uncovered a spy ring. This brought an end to the "Polish" chapter of this route. (The fate of the detainees will be told in the next chapter.) It is interesting to note that for two months, and until the unfortunate incident described, this escape route had been successfully operated by refugees who were not fluent in either Hungarian or Romanian.[14]

A local man, Yehuda (Pici) Levi, a member of the movement from Kolozsvár, was attached to the project only after this mishap. He had reached Budapest with the help of documents provided by Hannah Ganz, and upon his return continued with the same methods used previously in bringing the people to the border town, but introduced one change: he personally accompanied the group to the border, together with the smuggler, and paid the latter only when he saw that the refugees had safely crossed into Romania. This prevented the smuggler from extorting more money, as had been done with some groups. The drawback was that the smuggler escorted them only up to the actual border, and they had to find their way themselves in the unfamiliar Romanian territory. They had to reach the nearest village and from there take the train to Arad. For this purpose they were provided with Romanian money. There was no practical possibility of ascertaining what happened to them in Romania, though reports sometimes trickled through from Arad.[15]

After the arrest of both Hannah Ganz and Asher Arányi, only the *tiyul* route of *Hanoar Hatzioni* continued to operate, though under the cloud of the detention of the refugees. As a result of the ghettoziation, which

had now been carried out in most parts of the country, and the deportations from the provincial towns, there were now many more candidates wishing to undertake the *tiyul.* The escape of members of the movements from the ghettos, the reassuring reports that had come from Romania, and the ability of the Resistance to provide more and more documents for the trip all intensified the demand for the *tiyul.* At this point Moshe Alpan, on behalf of the *Haganah* Committee, assumed responsibility for managing the *tiyul.*[16]

Alpan made the first trip to Nagyvárad with a large group composed of members of several movements. Some of them were arrested en route and others, fearing failure, returned at once to Budapest. A few members of *Hashomer Hatzair,* Dan Zimmerman among them, remained to attempt to reopen the crossing. Zimmerman, who until then had dealt with document forging, was assigned to enter Romania where he would help in the reception of members of his movement and handle their *aliyah* to Palestine. He found that everything had to be rebuilt from scratch, a problem which recurred every time there was a failure. Zimmerman told of one experience:

> The smuggler did not keep his appointment with us and sent someone else, who turned out to be a drunk. He told us it was too dangerous to cross that night, and his brother-in-law had been afraid to come . . . . I decided to cross the border myself and took along a young boy who knew Romanian . . . . Toward morning we saw a village ahead of us and I hoped it was Romanian, as indeed it was. . . . Incidentally, we knew that there was nothing to fear because the Romanians did not return Jews to Hungary. This gave us the courage to enter the village.[17]

Two days later, with the help of local Jews who had bribed the gendarmerie, he reached Arad. Alpan remained in Nagyvárad and finally succeeded in reestablishing the *tiyul.* Thanks to the daring and talents of his staff, this route later became the most important one used, and people were sent along it to Romania until that country withdrew from the Axis on August 23. The entire operation was thorough and almost flawless. Alpan performed most of the functions, aided by experienced colleagues who prepared the groups in Budapest. A girl stationed permanently in Nagyvárad put Alpan in touch with the smugglers.

Success or failure depended first and foremost on the smuggler. Nothing could be done without him, with the exception of the one-time experience of Dan Zimmerman. That meant that the Resistance was in effect completely dependent on an external element over which it had no control. The gravity of the problem was indicated in examples cited by Alpan:

> 'Uncle' Nicorotz was a former officer in the Romanian police . . . . He detested the Hungarians and had a sympathetic attitude toward Jews. We became friends when I told him that though I was an Aryan I felt it incumbent on me as a Hungarian to aid the Jews. The old man was willing to help me pass a few of my friends over into Romania. For this purpose he mobilized a few peasants, and under my direction was able to set up a small but efficient apparatus. After a long interval we were again able to chalk up successes . . . . We used to get written confirmation of the safe arrival of the groups sent through 'Uncle' Nicorotz. This was important, because many smugglers offered only verbal confirmation which we were not always able to verify. It was only weeks later that we sometimes discovered that the refugees had been handed over to the gendarmerie. At the first sign of anything going wrong most of the border-runners were prepared to abandon their wards at the frontier. Many others thought nothing of stripping and robbing their unfortunate victims. This happened countless times, and we could even find cause for rejoicing when some smuggler 'only' robbed his people without informing on them to the authorities . . . . [A different character entirely] was 'Uncle' Peter. He was a peasant, a simple man, who felt close to the Jews because he was a Sabbatarian. This God-fearing man threw himself into the holy task of rescuing persecuted Jews . . . . 'Uncle' Peter was an excellent organizer. He surrounded himself with a small staff which he ruled with an iron hand. Together with him we carried out our final mission—the transfer across the border of the last Jews of Nagyvárad, who had hidden out and survived in all kinds of bunkers.[18]

One of the consequences of the integrated structure of the Resistance was that the moment it became clear that many members were converging on Romania, each movement sought to send its leading workers there,

either to preserve the identity and framework of the movement or to assure each movement's share in the immigration to Palestine. Among those crossed over were Pinek, of *Hanoar Hatzioni,* Dan Zimmerman, of *Hashomer Hatzair,* and József Gardos, one of the leaders of *Dror-Habonim* in Hungary. For the same reasons, *Bnai Akiva* sent Menahem Zvi Kádári to Romania.

Other views on the difficulties and dangers of the *tiyul,* as well as on its expanding scope, were provided by Kádári:

> My first experience was in the middle of May . . . . We reached Nagyvárad and our first task was to locate a smuggler who could help us send more people over . . . . We went to the premises of the *Vizhnitzer Rebbe* because we learned that that very night his whole court was to cross . . . . We spoke to the Rebbe but learned nothing from him; he apparently did not know himself. He blessed us, and we left. He and his people did indeed cross that night . . . . Before morning we were supposed to meet a smuggler, as arranged previously from Budapest . . . . We waited until about half past five but he did not appear. We decided to return to Budapest and left at once. . . . We returned about ten days later, and this time the contact had been arranged for us. All those in my group were members of *Bnai Akiva,* four from Poland, two from Slovakia, and two from Hungary. . . . The instructions were that when the train approached Nagyvárad we should gradually gather at the exist door and wait. The smuggler was supposed to come on board at this point, and when he jumped from the train we were supposed to jump after him. That is exactly how it happened . . . . Suddenly we saw that everyone on the train was jumping, hundreds of them. It seems that others had the same gimmick. Most of them were private individuals from Nagyvárad. . . . We stuck together and decided to run. Our guide agreed, and we ran after him. After about an hour of running we crossed the border.[19]

Although the group managed to get across, about half of them were arrested by the Romanians, apparently by gendarmes who had not been bribed in advance. The captives were returned to Hungary and sent to Auschwitz. The other half, with Kádári among them, reached Arad safely.

The route through Békécsaba, referred to earlier, was one of the first crossings used by the Resistance even as early as the end of March. The methods and procedures for determining regular passage had not yet been decided on, and this road had therefore not been used for a long time. It was only at the beginning of June that Jenő Dijósi, a member of *Maccabi Hatzair* from Slovakia, was sent to organize the crossing. The basic components here were the same as in other places, though each route had its own distinctive element resulting from local conditions, the times, and the characteristics of the operator.[20]

Dijósi, who spoke the language, found a smuggler among the Slovakians in the neighborhood. He even brought the smuggler to Budapest to have him meet Zvi Goldfarb, who was introduced as a Polish officer, and this impressed the Slovakian peasant no end. Only then were the methods and terms of work agreed upon. The Slovak accompanied the first group to Békécsaba and from there to the little border village in which he lived, where he kept the fugitives hidden till nightfall. After he set up his base, and the *tiyul* began, the fugitives were provided with two new escorts—wives of the local peasants. The women were given a telephone number so that they could report each time they got to town. There is no doubt that during the train ride these two women were more authentic than any thing the Resistance could have devised. This was one of the few routes, if not the only one, in which no accidents occurred and no one was arrested en route or in the border area.

It is difficult today to ascertain why these routes and not others were chosen, though there is little doubt that chance played an important role. The judgments and pressures involved in each case and in each detail cannot be reproduced now. It must be sufficient to take note of the wide variety of methods used in the organization, as well as the resourcefulness and the inventive talents of the movement activists, to say nothing of the ability of the Romanian Jews, especially in the border areas, who although not party to the planning, managed to get organized within a very short time and see to the efficient and secure absorption of the refugees.

The Romanian towns of Arad and Turda were the places through which most of the refugees entered the country. There, the brunt of the burden was borne by the activists of the Halutz movements and the orthodox communities. First of all, the local Jews had to look after the sustenance

of the refugees for at least a few days. Thereafter they had to see to their transfer as rapidly as possible to Bucharest where they would be received by a national committee of the Romanian Zionists. In order to achieve these two objectives they required legal papers and the cooperation of the authorities. In contrast to the situation in Hungary, such cooperation could be obtained in Romania on almost every level with the help of bribes and personal connections.[21]

Both Turda and Arad had some limited experience in taking in a few refugees from Poland who had come there from Hungary on their own power late in 1943 and early 1944. This experience gave local Jewry some idea of the nature of the problems that they would have to deal with later, though from the point of view of large-scale organizational requirements, it was insignificant.

The most difficult problems was to get the newcomers to Bucharest. The trip took about a day, and the train stopped at every station, where soldiers came aboard to check identity papers. Jews required special permits to go by train, and procurement of such permits was a complicated and arduous process. It was therefore not possible to utilize this means even for those who spoke Romanian, and the number of these among the members of the movements in Hungary was in any event extremely small. In effect a story had to be created, with special papers, for each individual case. One of the common methods was to provide some of the youth with conscription orders calling on them to report to Bucharest, or farther. Others were added to military units which were on their way to Bucharest. Most of the refugees were put under the watchful eye of the conductor—for a suitable fee, of course—and he shifted them around from place to place in the train whenever papers were inspected. Many others went by freight cars and some were even flown to the capital.

The problems in Turda were less severe because the number of refugees there was smaller. Two trains left for Bucharest daily, and it was possible to dispatch between ten and twenty persons each day. As soon as proper documents were provided the refugees could proceed so that their sojourn in Turda was relatively short and concentration of too many of them in a small town was avoided. This explains why there is no trace of any organizational activity by the movements in Turda, whereas activists from the various movements who had come from Hungary remained in Arad principally to look after the interests of their comrades who had to wait days

and sometimes even weeks before they could go on. The refugees begged to be speeded on their path. In the first place, their continued presence so close to the border was dangerous; in addition, they knew that shiploads of refugees were leaving for Palestine, and each movement wished to assure the *aliyah* of its members.

These two cities in Transylvania provided the best source for estimating the numbers involved in the *tiyul.* According to testimony by the activists in these places, between 1200 and 1500 persons passed through Turda, while about 6000 are said to have gone through Arad—figures that can account for almost all the refugees who came from Hungary.

Similar figures are derived from a study of the *tiyul* from the Hungarian side. As has been noted, not more than a few hundred refugees—most of them from Poland—crossed the border during the first period between the end of March and the middle of May. Most of these made use of the routes which had been organized and manned by the Halutz Resistance, though not all of them were members of a movement. From the middle of May, those fleeing from northern Transylvania included many local Jews who were usually familiar with the area and spoke Romanian. For the most part they were therefore not in need of aid from the Resistance, except in a few cases, such as that related to Moshe Alpan. There are no statistics regarding the number of these fugitives, but the information available about the organized *tiyul* makes it clear that during three months close to 2000 people crossed through Nagyvárad alone, in both routes. It would appear that the number of those from Transylvania who crossed in May and June without help from the central body was much larger. The estimate thus reaches about 5000. If one adds to these the number which went by other underground routes, the figure approaches 7000.[22] About a thousand of these were members of youth movements, refugees, and Hungarians. Almost an equal number were ordinary Jews, some of them refugees, who were rescued thanks to the Resistance. Some of them even participated in the expenses of the *tiyulim.* It is impossible to determine the indirect influence of the Resistance on those who crossed the border on their own initiative after they had observed how successful the halutzim had been.

In June most of the effort and energy of the Resistance was concentrated on the *tiyul* activity. Deportations from the provincial towns were then at their peak, and in the rush of events, the Resistance was relegated

to a marginal role—the task of saving a few Jews in the midst of the enormous storm of destruction which overwhelmed Hungary. The Resistance was painfully aware of its inability to exercise any influence on what was transpiring, yet even the limited rescue efforts it was able to mount during this period, which yielded relatively meager results, were beyond the expectations of the organizers, and without precedent up to that time. The *tiyul* period ended on August 23, when Romania withdrew from the Axis, and the border became a battlefront.

As the smaller cities of Hungary were being emptied of their Jews, it began to appear that the same process would in a matter of days or weeks be applied to Budapest. The government's attitude toward the Jews became ever more severe, and there was no single ray of hope anywhere. In mid-June Budapest's Jews were concentrated in special buildings whose façades were marked with a large yellow star, and they were called Yellow Star Houses (*csillagos házak*).

It was under these circumstances, when everything seemed lost, when Horthy, in whom they had placed such great confidence, remained silent, and when the Zionist leadership came to the realization that Brand's mission would meet with no reaction from the Allies except a public rejection, that preparations began for Kasztner's transport.[23] This shipment was supposed to be the first step in a larger program, a sort of good will gesture on Eichmann's part. The only assurance that the train would indeed be directed through France toward the Spanish border, and would truly be a rescue and not a slaughter train, was to be found in Eichmann's promise to Kasztner. This was certainly a most unreliable guarantee. The degree of confidence which this promise inspired in the passengers will yet be seen.

To get permission to organize this train required the Committee to spend huge amounts of money in bribes to the SS officers. Thus the financial aspect entered into the organization of the journey from the very beginning. Furthermore, the organizers had in mind an even more comprehensive plan, outside the purely Zionist framework. To the Resistance, however the rescue transport was but one of many projects, and not necessarily the most important. Attention was concentrated at this time on the *tiyul* and on bringing members of the movement to Budapest. All of the youth groups were also deeply involved in "Aryanizing" their members. Therefore, preparations for the transport, or to be more precise, preparation

of the lists of names, was to the Resistance but one of the many activities which could save members of the Halutz movements.

The compilation of the lists took about two weeks—precisely, the weeks during which most of Hungary's Jews were being sent to Auschwitz. The leadership, which was deeply involved in the preparations for the transport, was under no illusion as to the fate of those who were being sent eastward. Joel Brand's mission, which had for a brief moment fanned a spark of hope, had already lost all credence. Under these circumstances, a great many people placed their last remaining hope in Kasztner's project. One reason why it was difficult to prepare the lists was that the number of those to leave kept changing. It began with 600—the number of certificates available—and then rose to 700 when Hunsche demanded payment to the SS for the extra 100. The number rose to 1000 and then to 1300 and finally reached 1685. Up to the last moment—even in the railroad station itself—people were added or places exchanged. In most cases, when one person went instead of another, no one bothered to change the names on the list, so that a great many of the passengers did not bear their own names. By that time, of course, there was no longer any meaning to real names.

In his report Kasztner divided the passengers into ten categories.[24] For present purposes the breakdown will be less detailed, and will embrace three major groups. The first was composed of Zionists, including members of the youth movements, who had gained a place on the list under a party key, and by virtue of their being veteran Zionists and recognized active workers like Ernő Szilágyi, and Dr. Lajos Gottesmann, of the Revisionist movement. It must be noted that members of the Relief and Rescue Committee and many other well known leaders among them Ottó Komoly, Béla Dénes, Kasztner himself, and the treasurer of the Committee, Shalom [Sándor] Offenbach gave up their places.

The second group comprised prominent personalities, including the leaders of communities who had been brought to Budapest especially for that purpose. Among them were 388 Jews who had been taken from Kolozsvár, Kasztner's birthplace. The list also included rabbis, some of whom were rabid anti-Zionists, writers, journalists, professors, intellectuals in various fields—an impressive gallery of Who's Who in Hungarian Jewry. The third group was composed of Jews who bought their places on the train by making large payments. This was one of the sources for the financing of the whole venture.

The quota of the Halutz movements in the first group was 250 names. It cannot be said that this allocation was imposed on the movements. From available evidence, it appears that every member who so wished could have joined. Some of the movements did not fill up the number of places assigned to them. This did not prevent the controversies and quarrels which preceded the completion of the lists. The roster was prepared by a special committee which met in the Jewish Council building on Sip Street. Among those taking part were Ottó Komoly and Ernő Szilágyi. Some of the youth movement leaders remained close to the committee so as to safeguard youth's share. The movements accepted the number which had been allocated to them, but the exact figure changed as a result of the fluctuation in the total number, and also as a result of various pressures brought to bear on the committee. Selection of the specific names was the concern of each movement itself.[25]

It will be recalled that during this time the members of the movements had three possibilities open to them. The first was to remain in Budapest, with the help of Aryan papers, and to await the liberation which seemed to come closer each day. The second was the *tiyul;* and the third was the transport. To the Resistance, the primary goal was rescue, and all possibilities and activities were considered. It is understandable that the young people preferred to rely on themselves alone, and elected to remain in the capital, with the help of their Aryan documents. The great majority of those who made this choice did so because they believed it offered the best hope of survival. There was practically no attempt on the part of the movements to impose decisions or to guide the young people in making such decisions. There was indeed a certain degree of urging by the movement leadership to leave Hungary in any way possible, but the preference was for the most part to the *tiyul.* They sought to transfer some of the most active members in this way, but left behind those who could assure at least a minimum of movement activity, such as continued production of documents, and maintenance of contact with those who had been drafted into the labor service system. There was no certainty that any of the courses of action taken could be a successful guarantee of survival. Not all the attempts of the *tiyul* were successful, and not all who used this way to leave Hungary succeeded.

The major shortcoming of both the permanent use of Aryan documents and the conduct of *tiyulim* was that they were not always suitable

under all circumstances. Some members found it difficult to bear up under the psychological pressures of life in the underground. Such existence required not only "Aryan" features, but also a special character and nerves of steel. It is true that false papers were also required on a *tiyul,* but this was not permanent. The failure of a *tiyul* sometimes resulted in a return to Budapest, but there were also instances when the victims were sent to Auschwitz, and there was need to call an interlude in the activities for a while.

From the very outset the idea of the rescue transport was received by the Halutzim with suspicion. They did not relinquish their share in it, but neither did they display any great enthusiasm. The greatest objections were voiced by refugees from Poland, and in those movements in which they played a part they emphatically refused to be included in the lists. For example, not a single member of the group which had previously been in Mohács consented to be included, and they advised their comrades not to join any transport which came about on the initiative of Nazis, was approved by Nazis, and was accompanied by Nazis.[26]

Throughout the movements people displayed an inability to make up their minds, and it is easy to understand why. The opposition of the Polish refugees was logical and carried considerable weight. On the other hand, those who favored the undertaking found it convincing and an assurance of good faith that the relatives and children of the Komoly and Kasztner families were included. Hansi Brand and her two children were also scheduled to leave, but at the last moment Eichmann forbade the addition of the children. When the train pulled out of the Budapest station on the night of June 30, no one knew for certain which way it was headed. In retrospect, it appeared to be a daring gamble, though it turned out to be an unqualified success.

During the very time when the final preparations were being made for the transport, the *tiyul* program was hit by a succession of failures, and a number of members of the movements, deserters from their labor service units, were unable to get away as planned. Many others found it impossible to function under conditions in the underground. The transport was an ideal solution for all these. In the final analysis, there is no doubt that 250 young people constituted a sizable part of the movements, whose proportions were so modest.[27]

In the event, most of the members of the youth movements, among them Halutzim from Slovakia, concentrated in the first car and planned to disconnect the train from the engine if it should turn through Slovakia in the direction of Poland. They hoped that in this way many would be able to get away and to find shelter in the neighborhood.

After the train left Budapest it stopped at the small station of Mosonmagyaróvár near the German frontier, and the passengers on the 35 cars were permitted to get off. The delay lasted for a number of days, and during this time there was a rumor, attributed to one of the Hungarian train workers, that the train was going to Auschwitz. Already susceptible to rumors, the passengers were struck by panic. Later it turned out that there was a twisted degree of truth to the report, for the train was routed through the town of Auspitz.

The enormous tension and feeling of helplessness were further heightened by the incident which took place near Linz, in Austria. There passengers were compelled to undress completely and undergo disinfection, showers, and medical examination. The very word "showers" was enough to send shudders through the despairing passengers as they stood there naked. They already knew enough of what went on in the death camps. The atmosphere of hopelessness was increased by the attitude of the SS troopers who surrounded them. Apparently out of sheer force of habit under such circumstances, some of the Nazis coarsely and aggressively cut off the hair of some of the women. How different all this was turning out, compared with the original expectations that this special transport was to go to the Spanish border.

After a layover at Linz the train was sent to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp where the Nazis maintained several special sections, including one for people scheduled to be "exchanged." Conditions there were relatively bearable, and the Germans permitted the refugees to organize their lives behind the barbed wire as they wished. The first group of 318 people left there in August for Switzerland. The remainder followed in December.

The complex preparations, the arguments, and the gnawing doubts which surrounded the Kasztner rescue transport were to a large extent typical of the stresses, the uncertainties, and the lack of confidence then prevalent among Hungarian Jewry. The members of the movements were not immune from these feelings. If they took part in the project it was not out of any faith or confidence, but sheer lack of other alternatives at that moment.

The departure of the transport created a new problem for the movements. In Budapest they were left with "generals," well-seasoned in the ways of the underground, but with few followers. It was not by chance that this group comprised a larger number of the original refugees. The remainder also included a considerable number in the prisons, and an even larger number in the labor service units.

CHAPTER 7

IN AND OUT OF PRISON

There was never a moment in the history of the Halutz Resistance when there were not at least several members in prison. Their comrades outside did not always succeed in winning their release, but efforts were made constantly, with exercise of fertile imagination and at great personal risk. This sense of mutual responsibility provided a feeling of assurance which helped alleviate the mental strain on those incarcerated.

The first attempts to free prisoners began immediately after the arrival of the first refugees, but the fear for their comrades' lives mounted during the mass deportations, when the authorities would add Jewish prisoners to the transports which went from the provincial towns to the death camps. The time available for rescue effort was therefore usually quite short. The time span was determined in most cases not by the date of arrest but from the moment that news of the imprisonment reached the leaders of the Resistance. They had available then only the time until the next deportation, which was not known to them. If an attempt to liberate a particular prisoner failed, in most cases there was no longer any time to prepare an alternative course before the deportation.

Opportunities for bribery were more limited in Hungary than in Romania. Legal or semi-legal methods of bringing about a release were extremely expensive, and money was not always available. Furthermore, most Christian lawyers were unwilling to deal with imprisoned Jews. They

especially steered clear of cases in which the defendants were not just ordinary Jews, but persons accused of heinous crimes, such as distribution of forged documents, possession of foreign currency or weapons, suspicion of contacts with the enemy, or attempts to cross the border illegally. In the following pages the reader will find examples of attempts to free prisoners during the period between the arrival of the Germans and the assumption of power by the Arrow Cross Party on October 15, 1944.

Mention has been made several times of the *Hanoar Hatzioni* refugees who came from the Bedzin-Sosnowiec region and made Mohács their base in Hungary. Some of them reached Hungary via Austria. The last eight crossed the border from Austria near the Hungarian city of Sopron early in March 1944. They believed they had reached a safe haven and were already secure. They felt as if they had suddenly found an atmosphere of peace and tranquility which they had thought was no longer possible.[1]

Leon Blatt, the head of the group, sent a Hungarian woman from Sopron to accompany them, and the actual crossing took place without incident. The troubles began in a most unexpected manner after they were already in Hungary. A Hungarian female smuggler, who worked at her trade for the money—although faithfully and competently—was in partnership with her brother-in-law. As a result of a fall-out between them on money matters, the brother-in-law apparently informed the police of the presence of the Polish refugees in Sopron. Naturally, they were arrested at once. During the questioning the refugees claimed they were Christian Polish patriots fleeing from the Germans, and they produced appropriate documents. The authorities called in Polish exiles to serve as interpreters and to confirm the stories told. The true identity of the detainees was very quickly exposed. The Poles were not too eager to accept the Jews in their ranks, and "advised" the newcomers to admit their Jewish identity openly. They told the Jews that if the Hungarian police were convinced that they were indeed Poles, they might very well be sent to Germany, from which they had fled, or back to Poland. To the Jews this was a terrible peril, equivalent to the death sentence.

The advice given by the Poles was of course misleading, no doubt deliberately so. The Hungarians were not in the habit of handing over Polish refugees. To the contrary, the latter were treated in a warm and friendly

manner. If the refugees had been able to establish and maintain Aryan identies they would have been saved, both before the German occupation and especially thereafter. The unfortunate refugees were unfamiliar with the situation, and not realizing that they were being misled, they readily and naviely confessed that they were Jews.

At first, there was no change in the attitude toward them, and their situation even improved. The authorities informed the local Jewish community of their presence, the rabbi visited them in jail, and the community provided them with food. "There were a good many Jews in Sopron, and they brought us a lot of food, dishes we had not seen in years," Ruth Bayuk, a member of the group, recalled.

As was to be expected in a country ruled by law, and Hungary was still in that category, the refugees were placed on trial for illegal crossing of the border and were sentenced to two weeks in prison. For people who had gone though all the fires of Nazi Hell, this was a reward rather than a punishment. Their two weeks behind bars, almost under conditions of a rest home, nearly convinced them that they had done the right thing in admitting to their Jewishness. They became careless and spoke freely. They told their investigators of all their hardships and all they knew about the Jewish Holocaust in Poland. Their words were of course recorded as required by law. The date of their release was set for March 20, at which time then they were to go to Budapest and join their comrades. Unfortunately, the Germans came before that date, and they were not freed.

After about two weeks they were transferred, under guard, to the Toloncház (jail) in Budapest. During all this time contact had been maintained with those of their comrades who had already reached the capital. The latter attempted to stimulate the local members of the movement as well as members of the Rescue Committee into efforts to bring about their release, but in vain. Finally, toward the end of May, they were transferred again, this time to the detention camp on Rumbach Street. This had originally been one of the camps set up by agreement between the police and the OMZSA, to house refugees. As a result of the change in condition after March, this became a jail like all others, though it still remained under supervision of the Hungarians, rather than the SS. The newly arrived refugees were unaware that people scheduled for deportation were gathered from here, a fact which their comrades outside knew very well. Still, the newcomers found prisoners who had been there since before the occuption.[2]

It was clear that everything possible had to be done to get them out. Attempts were made to obtain their release with the help of local lawyers, but these efforts failed. The anxious prisoners urged that an escape attempt be made. The plan and the execution of the jail break were made easier as a result of the constant contact with the outside, maintained through Hungarians who were permitted to bring in food freely. The prisoners succeeded in making an opening in the wall, and with the help of sheets strung together as ropes descended to the street, where they were picked up by their comrades and taken to a hiding place in Rózsadomb, one of the luxury neighborhoods of the Hungarian capital. *Hanoar Hatzioni* had succeeded in setting up a sort of staff headquarters in a villa there.[3]

A mysterious figure, known only as Peter, was associated with this villa. No one knew for certain if he was Jewish or not, but he played the role of a Polish aristocrat, as indeed he might have been, and he had excellent connections with Hungarian army officers who afforded him their protection. For a fee, he enabled the Resistance to make use of these connections as well, but the relations between them went beyond the mercenary. Later, when Peter was arrested and managed to escape, the Resistance provided him with false papers.

The big basement under the villa was used as a bunker to conceal both people and weapons. The source of these weapons was Peter, or to be more precise a Hungarian army officer who sold them to him. The escapees were hidden there, in the hope that it would become possible to take them on a *tiyul.* Some of them did indeed get away, and the others were in the group that was caught at Nagyvárad together with Bayuk. Before the departure of this *tiyul,* Siegfried Roth had suggested that some of the Polish refugees should avail themselves of the quota allocated to *Hanoar Hatzioni* on the Kasztner rescue transport, but they all refused.

As the activities of the Resistance were expanded, more and more of its members were caught by the police and imprisoned. One group, with Hannah Ganz, was seized on a *tiyul* at Kolozsvár. Shortly thereafter another party was captured at Nagyvárad. Many others, whose numbers may never be known, headed for the Romanian border, but were arrested on the trains. Some activists were taken into custody in Budapest itself. Thus, an entire group of members of the Hungarian *Hashomer Hatzair* movement was apprehended as a result of careless congregating. The

detainees were held for a time in the central prison in Budapest. Others were confined to detention camps outside the capital at Kistarcsa and Sárvár, which served as a waystation preliminary to shipment to the death camps in Poland.

Difficulties for the Resistance mount in April and May. At this time two leading members of *Bnai Akiva* were also arrested. They were David Oslander (Oszi) and David Friedmann, who were in charge of a large part of the Resistance activity in their movement. Both bore Aryan papers, of course, but they also had on their persons a considerable amount of money and a large number of additional documents which were to be distributed that very evening. Their comrade, Zadok Rab, who had arranged to distribute the money and the papers, and was awaiting them, was placed in a serious predicament.[4] The arrests left the movement with neither papers nor money. Rab hastened at once to the unofficial Zionist center in the Provincial Cities Department in the community building on Sip Street. He sought out Gábor Schlesinger, who worked there as representative of *Mizrahi,* but Schlesinger was absent on that day. Rab turned to Szilágy, and through him received a small sum and false documents which apparently had been produced at the laboratory of *Hashomer Hatzair.* This timely help enabled *Bnai Akiva* to overcome the mishap, and most likely averted the possible chain of arrests which might have resulted.

The *tiyul* from Nagyvárad was temporarily suspended following the arrest of Asher Arányi. One of the most experienced workers in the Resistance, Mimish Herbst, of *Hashomer Hatzair,* then received information which suggested the possibility of opening a route through Szeged. The first group which left from there was caught at the border and taken to prison in that city. This was a most unusual group, composed of relatively experienced members, including Herbst himself, his wife Juci, and a Polish lad named Hans. They did manage to escape, but were again arrested. The third time, only Mimish got away; Juci and Hans were caught. At this stage a collaboration began with a mysterious Serbian character by the name of Milan, who was in the service of the Gestapo. Mimish had met him during imprisonment in Szeged. Rafi Benshalom wrote about him: "Who was Milan in reality? He was undoubtedly a Gestapo agent. He claimed that as a Serbian he had infiltrated into the lion's den so as to help his brethren. We believed him. He was faithful to us, ready for self-sacrifice, courageous—a genuine partisan."[5]

The tale of how Milan succeeded in extricating Mimish's wife is a fascinating one. He asked one of the girls from the movement to accompany him, but gave no satisfactory explanation for this strange request. There was genuine fear that this would entail unnecessary risk, but it was decided to comply for the simple reason that there seemed to be no alternative, and the Halutzim were always very much concerned about the fate of each member under arrest. This kind of solicitude existed in other resistance movements as well, but in this case the anxiety ran even deeper. It was part of the very character of the Halutz youth group, in which the members were knitted together by extremely close bonds, family-like in nature, and going far beyond the loyalties of resistance activity or ideology.

Tzipi Agmon (Teichman), Efra's wife, was selected to go with Milan. In the meantime, all the prisoners had been transferred to Topolya (Topola) in southern Hungary, a Serbian region which today belongs to Yugoslavia. Milan appeared there and told them that his "wife" was ill and he was in need of domestic help. He asked that they give him a Jewish girl who was being held there. The request certainly was most unusual, but for some reason it was granted. In this way Juci was released, broken in body and spirit. She had been subjected to cruel tortures in an attempt to wring information from her regarding the underground ring responsible for the false documents and the prison-break attempts. Her inquisitors had been especially interested in ascertaining the whereabouts of her husband, but not a helpful hint escaped her lips.

Every arrest contained within the seeds of danger to the entire movement, beyond the loss of a colleague who was apt to be sent to Auschwitz. This indeed occurred to many members who could not be liberated in time. During those very days the death trains were leaving Topolya for Auschwitz, but it is not known if there were Resistance members aboard.

After Juci's liberation, ten members of the Resistance, from various movements, still remained in prison in Topolya, and once again Milan undertook to free them. It was July, after the Kasztner rescue transport had already departed, and at a time when the second transport (which never left) was being readied at the Columbus Street camp in Budapest, under SS guard. The idea was to have the Topolya prisoners transferred to this camp. Milan was again successful, and after bribing whoever had to be bribed, he had them brought to Columbus Street. Misfortune awaited them. Suspicion was aroused by the excess enthusiasm of Mimish, who

considered it his personal responsibility to see to the rescue. Two did manage to disappear, but eight were sent back to prison, this time to the SS at Fő Street. From there they were returned to the prison in Szeged and finally, as became clear later, it was Milan who obtained their release from there.

At about the same time another band, composed principally of Polish refugees, was caught at the border. Here the major initiative was taken by *Hanoar Hatzioni,* whose members were at Topolya. Mimish and Pil arranged a contact between this group and Milan, who proposed sending the detainees to the jail at Fő Street, promising that he would get them out of there. The suggestion was at first received with grave suspicion since other refugees were also being held at Fő Street, and there had been no success in getting them out. This prison was located near the regional courthouse of Pest, and was well-guarded by both Hungarians and the German Gestapo. Both criminal and political prisoners were kept there. Resistance members were sent here only when the authorities attached special importance to the investigation, especially when there was suspicion that some kind of organization was behind them. Milan succeeded here, too, in having them released.[6]

Another exploit brought together the two strange figures, Milan, the Serbian lifesaver in the service of the Gestapo, and Peter, the mysterious Pole. This was in connection with the three who were behind bars in Pécs because of the murder of a man who had collaborated with the Nazis in Poland. They had been condemned to death, but various ruses were employed to defer execution of the sentence. In one method, every time a member of the movement succeeded in getting to Romania, a letter was sent to the police in his name, "confessing" to the crime. The police would look into the story and would confirm each time that a man by the name given had lived at the address he claimed, but that he had since disappeared. All this took time. The prisoners themselves suggested another way of escape. Milan, Peter, and two Resistance members drove to the prison disguised as SS men seeking to interrogate the prisoners. It must be said that at this time Peter was wanted by the police for breaking out of prison, and was carrying papers provided by the Resistance. Milan, as a Gestapo man, knew that a high cash reward had been offered to whoever turned Peter in. In short, each of the participants was taking a great risk, even considering that the Resistance was paying Milan for his services.

The attempt failed because the intermediary who had passed the message on from the jail to the Resistance turned around and informed the police. As a result the jail authorities were ready and foiled the effort. The three prisoners were not freed at this time, but contact was maintained with them until the end, thanks to the protection afforded by credentials issued by the International Red Cross and obtained from Ottó Komoly by Tushia, sister of one of the prisoners. They were finally freed by the Soviet Army.

To this day no one knows who Milan really was, what his motives were, and what was the extent of his connections with the Nazis. One thing is certain, however: thanks to him lives were saved. It required no small measure of daring and risk, as well as a bit of luck, to preserve contact with a man like that. Perhaps it can be termed Resistance "sixth sense."

All these feats required not only a considerable degree of self-sacrifice from the participants, but also large amounts of money for bribes. The Relief and Rescue Committee was practically the sole source of these funds. It can be understood, therefore, that the operations of the Resistance sometimes had to be closed down with the result that the two policies, known respectively as the "little line," that of the Resistance, and the "big line," that of Kasztner, which were supposed to be parallel, actually intersected.

The readiness of people to endanger themselves in efforts to bring about the release of a comrade must arouse both admiration and amazement. The willingness of some people to help even without any visible reason for doing so must evoke even greater wonderment. Such was the case, for example, of an SS lad who served as a guard at the Bocskai Street camp in the days preceding the departure of the Kasztner transport. He was known only as Fritz. He was about 18, and was more interested in getting a harmonica than in the war.[7] Peretz Révész established a relationship with him, and when he presented the young German with the much longed-for harmonica, the boy was ready to do almost anything for his benefactor. A genuine SS man was a veritable treasure for the Resistance, though it is difficult to believe that Fritz really knew what he was doing. This was one of the very few instances in which neither money nor ideological motives led to the cooperation. It was a case of simple lack of sophistication, a quality which had all but disappeared in the Budapest of mid-1944.

The episode of Fritz occurred during the preparation for the transport and shortly before its departure. One of the problems which particularly disturbed the Resistance people at this time was their inability to release precisely those members who had to be gotten out of Hungary, and were then in custody. In his anxiety, Révész decided to try to extract some benefit from his new friend. Among the young detainees in the Kistarcsa Camp was the wife of one of the members who was due to leave on the transport. Révész asked Fritz to attempt to take her out of the camp and attach her to the group with her husband. Fritz agreed to try. He was provided with false orders, produced by the laboratory, and went to Kistarcsa. The effort succeeded, although Fritz reported that he had had difficulties because he was alone. It was customary for SS personnel to be accompanied by an escort from the special department headed by László Koltay, who was known to be with the Hungarian Gestapo.

In view of his achievement, a second effort was made, this time to get two girls out of a jail in Budapest. On this occasion Révész accompanied the German in the role of Hungarian escort. The exploit almost failed when one of the policemen asked for credentials signed by Koltay himself. It is not exactly clear whether disaster was prevented by the threats from Fritz or by the compassion of the policeman. The upshot was that two additional girls were liberated and added to the Transport.

After these two deeds it was decided to use Fritz for a much larger operation. Thirty-eight members of the Resistance were being held in Budapest's central prison. Révész himself had been incarcerated there a year earlier, and it was therefore out of the question to have him take part. Fritz refused to go alone, and Rafi Benshalom—blond and "Aryan" looking—was chosen to serve as his escort. He spoke German well, and Hungarian quite adequately. What was more important, he had both the experience and the self-confidence so necessary to go into the lion's den with any expectation of getting out.

On June 28, two days before the transport was scheduled to leave, Rafi and Fritz showed up at the prison with "official" orders to transfer the 38 who were supposed to be there. Preparation of the list was not easy, since it was never certain who had been caught, and under what name. The first stage passed easily enough. They were received without suspicion, and it appeared that the deception was going to succeed. The prison director ordered a special vehicle for transfer of the prisoners. At

that very moment a sudden air raid sent everyone scurrying to the shelters. The alarm lasted for some time, and in the interval the director decided to seek approval from his superiors. It was clear that the attempt had failed. Rafi and Fritz managed to get out safely, but the Resistance members were not liberated.

Rafi Benshalom has described the incident fully. Additional details, from the other side, were told by none other than Hannah Ganz, who had been captured with a group that had tried to get to Romania. After the usual interrogations, she was transferred from prison to prison for a month and a half, and together with 37 others finally brought to the central prison in Budapest.

> On the last day, when they were preparing the groups to be removed from Budapest, there was an American air raid on targets close to the prison, and we were all taken down to the shelters. . . . While we were awaiting the all-clear, some SS men appeared and they began to call out our names. To me that was a bad sign. I looked at them and suddenly recognized one as our comrade, Rafi Benshalom. I then knew what was going on, and felt that we were all free at last! What a good feeling it was! We had only to be patient and everything would be alright. In the meantime, the bombings continued without end, and I saw that the men were leaving. Rafi signalled me, gave me an encouraging glance, and my confidence returned. So long as they knew where we were, and since they had already found a way to reach us, I was sure they would return. The next day they did not appear and we were taken away. I thought they surely knew where we were then—in a camp at Sárvár. From there we were taken to Auschwitz.[8]

Hannah Ganz told this story when she returned from Auschwitz, of course. Many of the others never came back. The prisoners were not the only ones to despair. Their comrades on the outside were equally despondent. The knowledge that the Kasztner transport was due to leave in a day or two, and that if they had succeeded, their comrades would have been placed on the train without difficulty, simply heightened their sense of failure and frustration.

Another victim of a *tiyul* misfortune was Alexander (Sanyi) Grossman, one of the leading activists of *Hashomer Hatzair* and coordinator of the movement in the Miskolc region.[9] Grossman was a member of the senior group and no longer active in the youth movement itself. During this time, people like him, in their late twenties or early thirties, began to play a role in most of the movements. They already had fairly considerable experience and in most cases undertook major organizational functions. Thanks to his personal connections, Grossman was able to reach Budapest after his entire family had been sent to Auschwitz. Upon his arrival in the capital he at once turned to members of the movement, ready to take his place in management of Resistance affairs. The leadership charged him with the task of replacing Dan Zimmerman in Arad.

The next group that was assembled was typical of Moshe Alpan's method of operation. There were 11 members, half of them from *Hashomer Hatzair* and half from other movements. They arrived in Nagyvárad just as the ghetto was being liquidated, which meant there was an enormous concentration of police and especially of the gendarmerie. As arranged, Grossman met Tamarka Benshalom, who served as the local contact. Almost immediately thereafter they were arrested and taken to the local police station, and from there to the ghetto. By sheer chance Grossman heard that the Gestapo was looking for a mechanic. Having nothing to lose, he declared that there were four mechanics in his group. There was no truth to his words, of course, but this saved their lives. They were separated from the other ghetto dwellers and were taken to the local Gestapo headquarters. Within a few days Grossman was sent to the regional prison on Fő Street where the authorities were already holding some Resistance members who were believed to be possible sources of information.

The relationship between the Zionist activists and the Halutzim of the youth movements on the one hand, and the Jews of Palestine through their mission in Istanbul, on the other, was, of extreme importance. It had a decisive influence on both the thinking and the organizational development of the groups in Hungary. The arrival of parachutists from Palestine therefore constituted a continuance of this contact.

Joel Palgi and Peretz Goldstein crossed the Dráva River from the area controlled by the partisans in Serbia on June 19 and finally reached Budapest. Hannah Szenes, who crossed the border separately, was

captured by the Hungarians immediately. The two young men were completely on their own from the moment they entered Hungary, and had to find their own way to the organized Zionists in Budapest.[10] The only address they had was Kasztner's, who was at that very time at the peak of his negotiations with the SS; the transport was due to leave the following week. The parachutists were unaware of all this, of course, but realized the danger involved in going to that address. But they had no choice; they looked up Kasztner. At their first meeting with him they heard about his rescue plans, about Brand's mission, and about conditions in Hungary generally. This was their first confrontation with the new realities that had been created since the German occupation had begun.

Later they met with the Halutz Resistance activists, and from them heard about the "Aryanization" of the movements, about the *tiyul,* the unfortunate attempt to get to Yugoslavia, the bunkers, and all the other rescue efforts.

All this was a strange new world to the parachutists, who were not prepared for what they found in Budapest at the end of June 1944. They were completely unprepared for the grim reality of the Holocaust. Indeed, could it have been possible to prepare anyone in Palestine, or in Cairo with the British army, for the horrible actuality of the Holocaust in Europe?

The idea of sending Jewish parachutists into Europe had been proposed as early as the end of 1942, when the first preliminary reports of the annihilation had begun to reach Palestine Jewry. The first suggestion was to organize large groups of 30 to 40 members each and send them to each country where, together with the local organized Zionist youth, they would set up a fighting resistance and engage in partisan warfare. A project of this scope would have been possible only with the full cooperation of one of the belligerent armies, which would train the force and somehow infiltrate it into the target countries. There was also need to arm the force and assure a more or less reliable supply line for military equipment, communications, and food, on the assumptions that there might be no broad base of support from the local population. A program of this sort would in any event have had few changes of success, but it would certainly have required the full support of the combatant armies. From the outset the idea was almost naturally linked to the British forces. What was actually implemented was not the broad program, but the dispatch

of only a few parachutists, and those not until the middle of 1944.

The candidates chosen for this difficult and complex mission were young people of about 20, most of whom came to Palestine in the late 1930s. They were supposed to be sent to the lands of their birth. Joel Palgi and Peretz Goldstein absorbed everything they could possible learn about events in Europe. Palgi was located in Tel Aviv and there had access to all the letters which had reached Palestine from Hungary, via Istanbul. This correspondence included all the information that had been gleaned from the refugees who had come from Poland. This was possibly the most reliable and most up-to-date source of written material, though obviously there was a time lag of from two to four months after the events in the field. Four additional months elapsed from the time the parachutists left Tel Aviv until they reached Hungary.

Another level of advance preparation was the personal meetings with the refugees then arriving in Palestine, among them Joseph Korniansky and Eliezer Unger, men who were certainly able to provide reliable, accurate and most recent reports of what had been happening in Europe up to January 1944. What the parachutists might find in Hungary at the end of June was of course impossible to foresee. It is important to understand not only what the parachutists heard but also how they absorbed and understood these things. Thirty years later Joel Palgi recalled:

> We were five: Dov Berger (Harari), Hannah Szenes, Shaike Dan, Abba Berditchev, and me. Two or three days before we went to Egypt we were summoned to a convention of *Hakibutz Hameuhad,* including even those who were not members of *Hakibutz Hameuhad.* One evening a member introduced us to two friends who had just arrived from Hungary, Joseph Korniansky and Eliezer Unger. . . . I recall that for hours we sat and listened to horror stories, and asked questions and repeatedly interrogated the two. I want to emphasize that this was after I had read every possible piece of paper which had come from the Diaspora, at least during 1943. We listened to what they had to say, and I shall never forget [what conclusions we drew.] The discussion among us ran something like this: "These comrades are apparently in a state of shock. The situation is obviously terrible, but they are exaggerating," and so on. . . . From the point of view of logic and awareness, I confess, and I include my

> comrades too, that we did not have even the most elementary idea of what the extermination was like. . . . I want you to know this, and it is most important to be insistent, so as not to create a distorted picture. The atrocity stories of course referred only to Poland; the picture of Hungary provided by our intelligence reports was completely the opposite.[11]

After they left Palestine they received current Hungarian newspapers and listened to Radio Budapest. They were in Cairo when they heard the broadcast from Hungary on March 19, and a few days later they left for Italy, from where they flew for the jump into Yugoslavia. Thereafter, and for more than two months, they had no sources of information.

The parachutist venture, in terms of saving human lives, was a complete failure. The arrival of these brave people complicated matters for Kasztner and the leaders of the Resistance. There is no reason to believe that under any circumstances they could have become skilled leaders of the Resistance, any more efficient and any more expert than those who were actually in charge. There is another aspect to this undertaking, however, over and above immediate practical results. From this point of view, Rafi Benshalom expressed the feelings of the Resistance in Hungary: "There was another side to it. During those tragic days when we felt bereft and isolated, the exploit had an enormous symbolic value which will be recorded forever in the annals of Jewish defense and rescue."[12]

When it became clear to Kasztner that the arrival of the parachutists was known to the authorities, and that they were being sought, he also knew that Brand's mission to Istanbul no longer had any chance of success either. It could not be expected that Brand would return with any satisfactory reply. At this point Kasztner came up with the staggering idea that Joel Palgi should present himself to Eichmann as a representative of the *Yishuv* and the Jewish Agency. To understand how such a suggestion could be made, one must realize that at the time the mission in Istanbul was seriously considering the dispatch of Menahem Bader from Palestine to carry on the negotiations with Eichmann. This plan was not implemented only because the British objected to the sending of a Palestinian national. The two parachutists did not tell Kasztner or the Resistance leaders about Hannah Szenes, nor did they reveal that they were both British Army officers. None of them knew that Hannah Szenes was

already in the hands of the Hungarians.[13] Kasztner was at this time so deeply involved in the rescue transport and so apprehensive of its fate, that it is difficult to believe that his judgment was entirely cool and logical.

Joel Palgi's consent to this idea was even more surprising. This was more than courage; it was practically an act of self-sacrifice to effect rescue of those in the transport. Palgi met with the SS and emerged unscathed. It was only several days later that he was arrested by the Hungarians and held in various prisons until November. In the meantime their Serbian contact, who had taken them across the border, was also apprehended and their communication equipment was also taken. Peretz Goldstein was now the only one at large, and he hid out in the Columbus Camp together with all those scheduled to leave with the transport, including his parents. Joel Palgi wrote in his book that he ordered Peretz to leave Hungary, either by a *tiyul* or with the Kasztner transport. According to Kasztner, the Germans demanded that Goldstein be handed over to them, failing which they threatened to send the entire transport to Auschwitz. Kasztner presented this dilemma to the 19-year-old Goldstein whose parents, as noted, were with the group, and the young parachutist decided to turn himself in.[14] Thus, at the end of June the three parachutists, betrayed by their Hungarian contacts, were in custody, charged with espionage. All the Serbian partisans who had a part in getting them into Hungary were also seized.

At the beginning of July the three were held at the prison on Fő Street, which was maintained in part by the Gestapo and in part by the Hungarians. As previously noted, both political and criminal Hungarian prisoners were kept there in addition to the Jews. Despite the complete isolation of all the prisoners, each of them quickly ascertained who were his partners in fate. Outstanding among the Hungarian political prisoners were Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, head of the Hungarian Resistance, József Antal, who had been in charge of refugee affairs in the Ministry of the Interior, and Lipót Baranyai, former Governor of the Bank of Hungary. The latter succeeded in establishing direct communication with the Horthy family even while he was in prison, and this contact later turned out to be of enormous importance. Joel Palgi related that the prisoners who had been close to the regime felt that by virtue of their imprisonment they were logical candidates to establish the new government after liberation,

and they spent most of their time composing such a government. According to him, they were prepared to accept him as ambassador to Hungary if his own future government would so desire.

The two parachutists were twice returned to Pécs, where they were interrogated by the Germans and the Hungarians in an effort to discover the code for their communication equipment.[15] Both were subjected to considerable torture in various prisons, but they revealed nothing, even though at this stage the matter was of no major importance. Their treatment was not uniform, ranging from cruel torture, to a correct and polite attitude. The legal situation in Hungary at this time was quite strange. Hungary was *de jure* a sovereign state, and the Germans were allies rather than conquerors. The de facto situation was in most cases entirely different. Nevertheless, not all the hallmarks of national independence had disappeared. The conditions in the prisons were mixed, sometimes like those in a normal prison in a state governed by laws, and sometimes like those in a concentration camp.

All arrests, whether of parachutists, Resistance workers, Zionist leaders, or Hungarian statesmen always began with interrogations accompanied by blows and torture. This was part of the system. On the other hand, during the course of the incarceration, usually without a trial of any kind, it was possible not only to visit the prisoners but also to bring them food from the outside. Because of this "liberal" custom, the jailers took no special pains and served food that was both bad and inadequate. The ones who suffered most were those who had no one on the outside to provide additional rations. The two parachutists were rescued from starvation while at Pécs thanks to the local prostitutes who were also in jail. When the women came around to clean the cells they occasionally left a little food. Except for the almost constant hunger, this was a relatively easy period for the two men. After the questioning they were again sent back to the regional prison on Fő Street in Buda.

The "veteran" prisoner on Fő Street was Jenő Fränkel, former president of *Mizrahi* in Hungary. He had been arrested immediately after the German invasion because he was known as a Zionist leader. During the early days of the occupation Moshe Schweiger was also there, until he was sent to the Mauthausen concentration camp together with many political prisoners. Sanyi Grossman was interrogated there, as well as Siegfried Roth, after his arrest at the end of June.[16] Roth was from the very

beginning the political party representative of the General Zionists to the various agencies, among them the Palestine Office and the Rescue Committee, and also the coordinator and leader of the youth movement. A few days before the departure of the transport, one of the groups from this movement was intercepted while en route to the Romanian border. During the course of the usual questioning by the Hungarian police one of the members memtioned Roth's name.

Relative to the number of failures on *tiyul,* and the number of persons caught and questioned, there were very few cases in which names of activists were revealed. As a general rule the participants in the *tiyul* did not know the activists. When they were being prepared for the *tiyul* they were given a minimal amount of information that might be incriminating. Many were of course familiar with at least a few of the Resistance leadership, but arrests like Roth's were infrequent.

The group which was caught at Nagyvárad, and which apparently brought about the arrest of Roth, met with a mixed fate. Some of them were sent to the ghetto in Szeged, and there were placed on the deportation trains. To their good fortune the Jews of Szeged were sent not to Auschwitz but to Strasshof, near Vienna, and most of them remained alive. The remainder were sent to the general prison at Mosonyi Road in Budapest, and from there were shipped out to Auschwitz. The members of the movement tried to get in touch with Roth to inform him of their whereabouts, but—perhaps because Roth himself had already been arrested—they could not be freed.

During the deportations the Nazis would from time to time thin out the prison population by sending some of the inmates to the camps. Moshe Schweiger was caught up in one of these moves, and all of Kasztner's efforts to rescue him were of no avail until the beginning of 1945, when he released with the help of SS-*Obersturmbahnführer* Kurt Becher from Mauthausen. The deportations ceased soon thereafter, but Eichmann outwitted Horthy and succeeded in extracting two additional shipments from the Kistarcsa and Sárvár concentration camps.

In the middle of August an attempt was made by the Germans, without the knowledge of the Hungarian government, to take about a thousand prisoners out of the Fő Street prison and send them out of the country, undoubtedly to their deaths. Lipót Baranyai was apparently the one who informed the Regent at the last moment. With amazing alacrity Horthy

had the Hungarian army surround the prison and thus prevented the deportation. The Hungarians remained in their positions so that, in effect, while the Germans were containing the prisoners, they were themselves being restrained by the Hungarians.[17]

The Resistance knew full well that the prisoners were in perpetual danger in this jail. Grossman was in constant contact with Rafi Benshalom though the intermediary of an SS man who helped without any personal gain. Benshalom told of the enormous difficulties, and of their inability to find any way of getting the prisoners out, though every possibility had been examined. Since these were not anonymous young people picked up by chance, even Milan could not help. The likelihood of procuring their release upon payment of a large sum of money was seriously considered, but on September 11, the three parachutists were transferred from the prison on Fő Street to the military prison on Margit Avenue, on the grounds that they were British spies. At about the same time, the Resistance people were removed to the detention camp at Kistarcsa, apparently on the intervention of the Jewish Council. On Yom Kippur, and without any help from the Resistance, Roth, Fränkel, and Grossman were released. The relatively relaxed political conditions at the time might have led to the release of the parachutists as well, but they had already been taken to the military prison.[18]

A large proportion of the arrests of Resistance members was the result of *tiyul* failures. Reports of the German legation in Budapest reveal that both the Hungarians and the SS made special efforts to seal the border with Romania. There is no way of estimating how many people were caught. The evidence on hand is principally about the Resistance members who escorted the groups. Much less is known about those Jews not members of the Resistance, who were seized while trying to cross the border. Their number is very likely much larger than that reflected in the evidence that has been collected. The plight of those captured during the period from May to July was much more serious, for this was when the deportations were in full swing, and many of these people never reached prison. They were simply attached to the death camp transports and vanished without a trace.

One of the large groups that was caught and imprisoned, and about which considerable evidence is available, was that which included the Polish refugees and the people they were seeking to smuggle across the

border into Romania from Nagyvárad. When this group was apprehended at the end of May, the deportations from Nagyvárad had already begun. One party, which included Manus Diamant, was caught. A second party, among whom were a number of *Bnai Akiva* girls, was hidden in a nearby apartment with Zelig Bayuk. They were scheduled to leave on the following day, but after the police left, Bayuk decided to take no chances. He took the girls to the railroad station and they returned to Budapest. They were the ones who apparently brought the news of the arrests. Bayuk himself remained in the city to try to secure the release of the prisoners. First he attempted to get in touch with the Polish refugees who were permanently resident in the city—as Christians, of course—but was shocked to discover that they too had been arrested. It was very possible that there was some connection between these arrests and the capture of the group, as the police suspected that they had uncovered a nest of spies. Their suspicions were heightened by the dollars, the weapons, and the unconvincing explanations given by the captives for their presence in the border town. The sudden return of one group from the border served only to confirm the suspicions. In this way Bayuk, too, was taken into custody.[19]

The police found on Bayuk a number of certificates, all with different names, but with identical pictures. They had little difficulty in establishing that the documents carried by many of the others were also false. After interrogation, all but Bayuk were sent into the ghetto, which was in the process of being dismantled. The activists in Budapest attempted to get them released even while they were still in police custody, but to no avail. Once they reached the brick factory which served as the focal point for concentrating Jews who were about to be deported, no effort would help. The prisoners did their utmost to convince the authorities, both the Germans and the Hungarians, that they were not Jews, and therefore should not be included together with the local Jews who were being sent to Auschwitz. Only the obstinacy of the refugees and their wiles, plus a good measure of luck, resulted in their being returned to the police station, while the Jews of Nagyvárad were sent off to Auschwitz in the death trains.

After a few days, during which the police were undecided about what to do, they were sent to Budapest. They were all put on a train, under guard, each strapped to one of his comrades. In the vicinity of the town

of Püspökladány, the train stopped because of an air attack and all passengers descended to take shelter in the adjoining fields. Some of the group seized the opportunity to flee, and hid in the corn fields. They waited until the train continued on its journey, but the gendarmerie and local peasants continued to search for the runaways. They were all found. The group was united once again at the Toloncház central jail in Budapest.

While they were there an attempt was made to get them out, using contacts of the Rescue Committee, but again without success. After some time they moved to the detention camp at Sátoraljaújhely, near the Slovakian border in northern Hungary. During all this time communication was maintained between the prisoners and their comrades in Budapest. Attempts to break out from within, as well as to free them from the outside, continued without letup.

One example of what was going on:

> A woman told me she had a contact with the camp commander, and for a camera she would be able to get some people out. A camera cost 7,000 *pengős*. . . . I approached Shalom Offenbach, who was a member of the Rescue Committee. He was pleasant and friendly, but claimed there was no assurance that the scheme would work. We both went to Kasztner. He too said there was no certainty . . . and what a pity to waste 7,000 *pengős*. . . . I went back to Offenbach and to Hansi Brand. . . and finally, after much scurrying around, I obtained the money. . . . I immediately gave it to the woman, and she passed it on. To our sorrow, three of the seven had been shipped to Auschwitz a day earlier. . . . Four were indeed released and two of them, girls, were at once sent to Romania.[20]

Zelig Bayuk, who was among the deportees, managed to escape from the train, together with about a hundred others, while they were passing through Slovakia in the direction of Auschwitz, and he remained with Slovakian partisans. One of the two girls who again tried the *tiyul* was Ruth Judenherz, destined one day to be Bayuk's wife. She was again arrested, for the twenty-sixth time. Her comrades called here the "prison champion." At the end of October she was the only one of the original Polish group caught on *tiyul,* who was still behind bars. She was sent around to various other prisons until she got to the district prison of

Pest, on Fő Street. At least, in December, just as arrangements were being made to send all the prisoners to Germany, her friends succeeded in closing a deal with the Gestapo. The latter were getting ready to make their getaway before the city was completely encircled by the Red Army, but they had insufficient fuel for their trip. Tushia prevailed on Hansi Brand and Shalom Offenbach to get fuel for the Nazis, in return for the liberation of Ruth Judenherz. This was the final release, before the city itself was liberated shortly thereafter.

Relatively little is known about all the efforts to bring about the release of prisoners. The Resistance was lacking in means. The members were young, and without the necessary contacts with police circles, local lawyers, or influential members of the regime. The large proportion of refugees among the leadership of the Resistance made it even more difficult to exploit such possibilities. On the other hand, they were well able to organize a prison break, or to seize opportunities with the help of characters like Milan the Serb, or Fritz the German. Some of these efforts succeeded and others failed. Matters that required legal channels, or supposedly legal methods, were beyond them. All this applied to the period before October 15, when there was still a semblance of law and order, and a more or less stable regime. With the rise to power of Ferenc Szálasi, conditions changed and new opportunites were created—opportunities which the young Resistance was able to exploit competently.

In many cases members of the Resistance who were caught were at once placed in ghettos that were about to be liquidated through deportations, and there was no chance to save them. In most instances the news of the arrests did not even reach the central office until too late. There were other cases in which the captives were able to gain freedom by their own efforts, using various ruses.

Whenever the arrests were based on legal grounds, the Resistance was practically helpless. The only thing left was to seek to engage the services of Hungarian lawyers, something which could be done only through the good offices of the Rescue Committee. This is what was done in the case of the three prisoners in Mohács, in the case of the parachutists, and others. Kasztner mentioned his own efforts to rescue the parachutists and claimed that they were about to be released through the intervetion of a senior official in the Hungarian War Department, but the revolution

of October 15 thwarted the effort.[21] He gave no details, and all the others who have written on the subject have relied on his statement. There appears to be no possibility of confirming or refuting his claim.

CHAPTER 8

SUMMER 1944—TENSION SLACKENS

With the deportation of all the Jews from the countryside by the beginning of July 1944, the only Jews remaining in Hungary were those in the labor service units and those in Budapest. The Hungarians, in the main the Hungarian gendarmerie, had succeeded in organizing and carrying out the deportation of 437,000 Jews in a period of only about a month and a half. When they then turned their attention to the Jews of Budapest, a sudden and unexpected turnabout occurred, and the deportations were halted with the same abruptness with which they had begun.

To obtain a clear understanding of the emotional state in which Budapest's Jews found themselves at this time, one must realize that there was not the slightest expectation of any change. To the contrary, as the provincial towns were emptied of their Jews, it was clear that the noose was tightening around the capital. The atmosphere which surrounded the Kasztner rescue transport can be understood only in the context of the emotions of Jews who knew that they faced the dreadful fate of deportation and horrible death.

It is easy now to enumerate the elements which brought about the change, although a careful study does not necessarily provide any convincing explanation. The shift in policy came about as a result of accumulated political pressures which finally led Horthy to halt the deportations. In this way, the lives of most of Budapest's Jews were spared, at

least for the time being. The word "spared" is used in an objective sense, and not as a moral judgment. Just as the Regent and his government must be held responsible for what happened in Hungary between March and July, they must also be credited with what occurred thereafter.[1]

Information on what was happening in Hungary began to seep through to the governments and the public of the neutral countries—and through them to the Allies—about the middle of April, when the ghettoization was beginning in the provincial towns. The reports increased in intensity after May, during the departure of the large transports to the death camps. At the same time the by now well known Auschwitz Protocols, a detailed account by two Slovakian escapees from Auschwitz, reached Switzerland and from there made its way to the West. It was given, among others, to the neutral legations in Budapest, including the Apostolic Nuncio, Monsignor Angelo Rotta, who transmitted it to the Vatican. This report, which contained the first full description of Auschwitz's "murder industry," was also brought to the attention of elements in the Hungarian government, including the Regent, but the Jewish community leadership did not inform the local Jews. The report is not mentioned either by Kasztner nor by Benshalom in their books, although it is known that at an earlier date, Kasztner passed the information on to Switzerland. There was no reaction and no publicity.

No satisfactory explanation exists as to why the Auschwitz Protocols were not distributed among the Jews of Budapest. It would appear that there was no request for such distribution, not even from the leadership of the Resistance, which certainly knew of its existence. One of the very few reports on publicity given to the Protocols outside of official circles is to be found in the testimony of Dr. Alexander Nathan:

> A Zionist friend, Dr. Lajos Gottesmann, from *Betar* in Kassa, thrust into my hands a long and detailed report, covering several pages, which constituted the first authentic account of the mass murder of Jews in the Auschwitz and Birkenau camps. There was a proclamation attached which read, in effect: 'Read this and know what is happening to your family.' It called upon Jews, and especially the men in the labor service units, to rise up in armed opposition. That was at the end of June. After I read this I did not sleep for two nights. . . . I could not keep information like that to myself.

> I consulted with Zionist friends [in the labor service unit] and it was agreed that I should read the document to the whole unit. The reaction was awful. . . . [They called me] 'a defeatist, a traitor, a rotter.' They threatened to turn me in. It was no joke. If not for a few Zionist friends they would have beaten me to the point of death. One of the young men fell upon me with a big iron bar which my friends took away from him. The entire company was convinced that I was a provocateur, and that's how they treated me.[2]

At first, only a few timid, hesitant voices were raised in Hungary in protest against the deportations, and these were purely local in character. For example, the local churches objected to ghettoization from the very beginning, but their protests were largely against imposition of the anti-Jewish laws on those Jews who had converted to Christianity. Their protests continued during the deportations but for the most part referred to those who had converted. Even when they protested the brutality with which the deportations were carried out, they did not object to the act itself. The several meetings devoted to the deportations which took place in the Crown Council, and even in the government itself, dealt with the cruelty with which the evacuations were executed. During these meetings the deputy foreign minister, relying on reports reaching him from Hungarian legations in neutral capitals, persistently raised objections. It is not known if there was any other political pressure during this period to halt the deportations, but the foreign ministry continued to exert its influence at an increasing pace toward the end of June. During this time Count István Bethlen, former Prime Minister and a close friend of the Regent, over whom he had great influence, submitted a dramatic appeal. He firmly demanded immediate cessation of the deportations and the dismissal of the government headed by Döme Sztójay.

In his May 15 appeal to the Hungarian government and to the Prime Minister, the Apostolic Nuncio not only requested special consideration for the converts, but warned against further deportations. An even stronger protest, accompanied by a personal letter from Pope Pius XII, was conveyed to the Hungarian government on June 27.[3] At this time a sharp and threatening letter from the American Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, delivered through the Swiss legation, demanded that the Hungarians suspend at once the imprisonment of Jews in ghettos or camps, and

especially halt the deportations to Poland or anywhere else. This was followed by remonstrances, in a threatening tone, from President Roosevelt. On June 30 the King of Sweden sent a personal cable to Horthy in which he requested "in the name of humanity to take all necessary steps to rescue all who can yet be saved of this unfortunate race."[4] This chain of pressures and interventions preceded the change in policy by the Regent and his government.

The public at large of course had no idea of these diplomatic steps, just as it had no knowledge of the Auschwitz Protocols. During this time, all the Jews in Budapest were concentrated in Yellow-Star buildings. It was in effect a rambling ghetto, in which the principle of absolute separation between Jews and non-Jews was preserved. The hours during which Jews were permitted to go out on the streets was also limited. Throughout this time, at the end of June and the first week of July, deportations were taking place from Transdanubia (Dunántúl) and from the suburbs of Budapest. It became clear that the capital's turn was approaching.

The various reactions cited were a cumulative result of the continued deportations from the provincial towns. The mounting protests finally resulted in a temporary halt to the death transports. One comes to the tragic conclusion that the removal and murder of about half a million human beings, over a period of three months, was necessary before conditions were created in which Hungarian policy could be altered. There was of course no change whatever in German policy. In this connection the statement attributed to Horthy should be recalled, to the effect that he did not care what happened to the "Galician Jews," meaning the Jews in the provincial towns, and especially those in Carpath-Ruthenia, but he would not permit the deportation of the Jews of Budapest.[5]

Hungarian government documents reveal that on June 26, at a meeting of the Crown Council, Horthy ordered a halt to the deportations; but they did not cease until July 9. Full credit for this unexpected change must be given to Horthy himself, who managed to impose it on the government. There is no doubt that international pressures played an extremely important part in this matter. In addition, Admiral Horthy realized that the D-Day landings in Normandy, which had begun on June 6, and the success of which was becoming clear had increased his confidence in the ultimate victory of the Allies.

The first sudden surprise of the occupation was followed in ensuing months by a certain renewal of activity among the Jews of the capital. Sip Street became a busy, complex, and multi-faceted center of activities, to an extent which has not yet been sufficiently studied. In addition to the head of the *Judenrat* and his colleagues, representatives of all sorts of groups, milled in and around the building. A large number of senior Zionist activists worked within the framework of the *Judenrat,* especially in the departments which dealt with intelligence and the provincial towns. Since they operated as Zionists, they were to no small degree an alien and separate section within the system. Kasztner and the members of the Rescue Committee also carried on their activities in the community building, but they were not associated with the Jewish Council. Kasztner was never a member of the Council, and Komoly would not become one until the end of October. Cooperation was very close, however, between the Rescue Committee and the Resistance, especially after the failure of Brand's mission and during the preparations for the transport. In very many cases the youth movements too, concentrated around the community building. Though no love was lost between them and the members of the Jewish Council, the very fact of daily physical contact brought about a relationship between them which served to activate certain circles at Sip Street.

The emergence of a relatively young leadership within the Council is of considerable significance. These were lower-echelon workers who were influenced by the Zionist activities and were not prepared to agree to everything proposed by the older generation. The most important and most conspicuous project initiated by the young generation at Sip Street was the dramatic written appeal to the Hungarian intellectuals, calling for a halt to the deportations. Over the opposition of Samu Stern and the majority of the members of the Council, the younger people succeeded in imposing their will on the leadership and brought about distribution of the emotional document.[6] The appeal to Hungarian public opinion met with no immediately practical results, of course. What was important were the indications of independent thinking, which overcame the hesitations of the adult leadership. A gradual shift in attitudes and a much broader understanding of the realities were also revealed. This came about only after the tragic events in the provincial cities, all of which were very well known to the leadership of the Budapest community. The change

came late, and only when the Jews of Budapest were the sole surviving remnants.

In sum, at the end of June, several processes were operating along parallel lines. Those outside the sphere of German influence knew very well, though after tragic delay, what was happening in Hungary. Even so, the delay was not so prolonged as in those countries which the Germans conquered in the first years of the war. Under pressure of external influences, which also came tragically late, the Regent determined to halt the destruction of the Jews in his country. The Jewish leadership in Budapest, perhaps under the influence of Zionist activity, gradually and hesitantly began to develop a more independent and more dynamic line of action. At the same time, and despite the decline in the number of members, the Halutz Resistance improved its methods of operation and arrived at a clear understanding of its goals.

A comparison of these changes, which took place in Hungary during a period of less than four months, with similar processes which occurred in other places in Europe during the Holocaust do not lead to the conclusion that the reaction here was unusually delayed; perhaps even the opposite is true. However, since the German-Hungarian engines of destruction were so rapid and so efficient, whatever the Jews might have done would have been too late.

The shift in government policy, which began at the meeting of the Crown Council on June 26 and continued at subsequent meetings into July, was marked first and foremost by the cessation of the deportations, but there were other aspects as well. The Hungarian government also decided in principle, subject to German approval, to permit the emigration of about 7800 Jews, who would leave the country with the help of Switzerland and Sweden. The government meeting on June 27 named two neutral countries as the destinations, and added Palestine, on the basis of certificates issued by the British and transit visas which Turkey was prepared to issue. The figure of 7800 was supposed to be the first step in a much broader program. This Hungarian proposal to permit Jewish emigration became known as the "Horthy offer."[7]

The Swiss legation undertook to handle the proposal and transmitted it to the Allies through diplomatic channels. If this program had been implemented the Jews would have left Hungary through Romania, and from there by ship from Black Sea ports, or any Bulgarian port. Regrettably,

Horthy's offer was inadequately dealt with by the Western powers, and it finally came to naught on August 23 when Romania withdrew from the Axis, thus closing that emigration route. All that remained of the proposal was the principle that the Hungarian government would permit the legations of neutral states to extend their protection to Jews registered for departure. The figure 7800 became a magic number.

The Horthy offer, which had began as an international program for large-scale emigration, was thus transformed, and became the basis for totally unanticipated local rescue operations under the patronage of the neutral states.[8] These countries began to issue various sorts of a "Protective Pass" (*Schutzpass*) and the Halutz Resistance was later able to fashion a broad rescue program based on such passes.

The Swedes took the first steps, even before the announcement of the Horthy offer. The Swedish Foreign Ministry authorized the issuance of a limited number of "temporary passports" intended for Jews with relatives in Sweden, who in fact had initiated the idea. Holders of these temporary passports were regarded as "temporary" Swedish nationals. Although such a concept has no standing in international law, the Hungarian government accepted the fiction, and holders of the documents were registered with KEOKH, which afforded them the status of citizenship in a foreign state, and hence fully exempt from application of all the anti-Jewish laws. People who had close commercial ties with elements in Sweden were later added to the list, but in very limited numbers. The documents looked exactly like passports. They bore a serial number and a photograph. The Swedish Minister signed the first series, as a result of which these passports were difficult to forge.

Simultaneously with the issuance of these temporary passports, or immediately thereafter, Moshe Krausz sought to take advantage of the special status of Count Folke Bernadotte, President of the Swedish Red Cross, and invited him to Hungary to head the humanitarian activities being conducted under Swedish auspices. Bernadotte was well-known in international diplomatic circles, and his personal influence could have been of enormous value. Precisely for this reason, however, it is doubtful that the Germans would have welcomed his arrival. The Swedes therefore decided to appoint as representative of the Swedish Red Cross in Hungary Dr. Valdemar Langlet, a lesser known personality, and a lecturer in the Swedish language in Budapest.[9]

Langlet received his appointment on July 4 and at once began to issue Swedish Red Cross Protective Letters (*Schutzbriefe*). Unlike the temporary passports, these letters did not confer Swedish nationality, only protection. Nevertheless, the Hungarians honored these documents. Langlet and his wife, Nina, set up a small local staff which functioned to protect the holders of the letters. These were for the most part local Jews, acquaintances of the couple. Vicki Fischer, who had until then been occupied with the production of documents for the Resistance, was upon the intervention of Peretz Révész added to the staff of the Swedish Red Cross. The Langlet couple regarded their activity in this matter as a personal mission, and their deeds went far beyond what might have been expected from official representatives. More than once, at great personal risk, they even concealed Jews in their home.

The operations of the Swedish legation were conducted by a special Department for Humanitarian Affairs set up and administered by Raoul Wallenberg. It worked independently and separately from the Swedish Red Cross. Wallenberg was a young man, not a professional diplomat, who had been sent from Stockholm especially for this purpose. He arrived in Budapest on July 9, and during all the time he worked there he displayed unbounded initiative, personal devotion, daring, and willingness to take risks. Indeed, Wallenberg saved the lives of thousands of Jews and became an ever-growing legend, especially during the period after October 15, 1944.[10]

The most comprehensive resuce operations were those of the Swiss legation, or to be more exact, of the Representation of Foreign Interests in this legation. Since the outbreak of the war, the Swiss represented most of the countries with whom Hungary was in a state of war, including Great Britain. Legal immigration to Palestine from Hungary continued despite the war, and as a result close relations were established between the secretary of the Palestine Office, Moshe Krausz, and the Swiss Consul, Charles Lutz, who was in charge of these matters. Before coming to Hungary, Lutz had served in the Swiss legation in Palestine and had displayed considerable sympathy for the Jewish cause.

Lutz's department was located in the building formerly occupied by the American legation, in Liberty Square (*Szabadság tér*). Immediately after the German invasion, the Palestine Office was closed, and Krausz took up residence in this building, which enabled him to keep in constant contact

with the Jewish agencies in Budapest as well as with Jewish and non-Jewish elements from Switzerland. Considerable information on what was transpiring in Hungary reached the attention of the Swiss government and the Swiss public, thanks to Krausz. As the diplomatic representative of Great Britain, the Swiss legation was responsible for the exit of emigrants to Palestine and afforded them its protection until they left Hungary. It therefore provided such protection also to all Jews who were approved for emigration under the Horthy offer.

The scenes which had taken place before the departure of the Kasztner transport were now repeated in the matter of protection for those scheduled to go to Palestine, but in a much more systematic manner. The first objective was once again to draw up lists of names, and the Palestine Office Committee was again, at least theoretically responsible for such compilations. In reality matters developed somewhat differently, and this became a source of friction between Krausz and the Halutz movements. Here too, as in the case of the transport, matters were never one-sided, though no small part of the problem was a result of personal conflicts rather than the exigencies of the moment.[11]

Work on the new lists commenced immediately after departure of the transport. At that time it was not yet known that this was to be the only transport, and rumors were persistent that those going to work camps in Germany would in effect be transferred within a few weeks to neutral Switzerland and from there to Palestine. The threat of deportation hung menacingly over the heads of Budapest Jews, and they frantically sought solutions. No one could be certain what the preferable course was, and which alternative offered the best chance for life. They leaped at each spark of hope for rescue. These included the second transport, which was being organized at the Columbus Camp, and the new program under Swiss auspices. The large numbers of Jews who mobbed the Swiss legation to present their applications could have created problems, and Krausz therefore obtained the use of an office building on 29 Vadász Street from a local Jew, Arthur Weiss, who was the largest glass wholesaler in Hungary. The structure, with conspicuous glass elements in its architecture, was known as the "Glass House" (*üvegház*). This latter became an extremely important center for a wide variety of rescue activities in Budapest, and the building took on a symbolism of its own.

At Vadász Street Krausz headed a staff which he set up to prepare the lists of those to leave. As may be well imagined, thousands of Jews began to inundate the office of the "Emigration Department of the Representation of Foreign Interests of the Swiss Legation," which was the formal name of the Glass House. It will be recalled that the Hungarian Foreign Ministry had given its approval to the departure of 7800 persons, subject to German consent. All whose exit had been confirmed received an official certificate from the legation, in actuality, from the Jewish officials located there, specifying the bearer's "name appears on a collective passport to Palestine, and until his departure he is under the protection of the Swiss legation." These certificates were issued on the official note paper of the legation and bore the official stamp of the Swiss legation, but no pictures. This was the Swiss *Schutzpass,* which was also recognized by the Hungarians for the exemption of people from forced labor. By the end of August, when it became clear that there would be no emigration to Palestine after all, these certificates at least assured a preferred status and a bit more security.

The Spanish, Portuguese, and the Vatican, likewise began to issue Protective passes in small quantities and even a few passports of the type given out by the Swedes. At this time a few hundred genuine passports were received from El Salvador on the initiative of George Mantello, a Jew of Hungarian extraction, who had become a naturalized citizen of the Central American nation and had become its Consul in Bern. He also did a great deal to spread information about the fate of Hungarian Jews, and published the news in the Swiss press.[12]

Those who acquired a passport, and were thereby recognized as citizens of a neutral state, were released from the obligation to wear the yellow badge. Only a small minority of the capital's Jews qualified for such protection, though their numbers continued to increase. Even these Jews, however, were still completely subject to the good will of the Hungarian authorities who, if they wished, could simply ignore their new status. The problem was less acute during the summer months, when the deportations had ceased, but the situation changed and became a matter of life or death after Szálasi come to power on October 15.

On July 18 the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, which at this time was the agency dealing with the Jewish "problem," sent a circular around among the neutral legations declaring that it recognized the protection provided

by the various states to Jews who were about to emigrate from the country.[13] The Swiss legation, representing Great Britain, was also recognized as representatives of the Jewish Agency in its dealings with those who held immigration certificates into Palestine. The Foreign Ministry document fixed a numerical limit for each of the legations and also provided for absolute release from deportations for all Jews converted to Christianity before August 1, 1941. This was a governmental gesture to appease the Hungarian churches and the Vatican.

As a result of these changes in policy a new and separate organization was created, known as "Jewish converts." According to one source, the number of those enrolled in this organization quickly reached 70,000.[14] To be sure, nothing was promised to the new converts, but the uncertain atmosphere impelled people to grasp at any opportunity, no matter how faint. The two "necessities" most in demand during this period were, ironically enough, a baptismal certificate or a permit to emigrate to Palestine.

As the summer of 1944 approached there was a clarification both of the Resistance's methods of operation and of its primary goals. During the period immediately following the occupation the first steps were to establish an illegal basis for survival with the help of Aryan documents. In the days that followed, the major effects were put into organization of the *tiyul.*

The departure of the Kasztner transport for Bergen-Belsen created a severe gap in the number of members who were continuing to operate in Budapest. This situation became even more intense during the summer until the sudden, unexpected halt in the *tiyul* as a result of Romania's withdrawal from the Axis.[15] Throughout this period there was a constant turnover of activists in the various movements. Those who left were replaced by others who had come from the provincial towns or from the Yellow Star houses in Budapest or who had deserted the labor service units. Even the number of all these together was relatively small from July through September, when the danger of deportations or dispatch of the labor service units to the front was diminished considerably. In most cases the only ones who left were those whose departure to Romania had been arranged in advance. Despite the extreme danger, this became an almost routine process of promoting emigration to Palestine, since the need for immediate rescue seemed to have been lessened. In June and July some

people who had somehow managed to avoid deportation came in from the provincial towns. By August there were no longer any of these.

The atmosphere in Budapest changed considerably between early July and late August. At the beginning of this period the Jews of the capital were in perpetual dread of the deportations. The assumption of power by the Lakatos government on August 30, however, induced the feeling that the worst was over. From this time until the middle of October, the central concern of the members of the movements was simply to remain alive. The danger no longer seemed immediate. Many of the young men remained in the labor service, and a large number of these had already secreted away Aryan papers should they all have to go underground.

The only activity they had to continue with, and gradually perfect, was the production of documents. Only a few comrades were engaged in this, since the demand for papers had diminished considerably and for the most part took the form of fresh documents for those already in the Resistance. Production had to be first rate and sophisticated. This was probably the principal reason why most of this work began to be concentrated in one laboratory.[16]

Even when the movements were carrying on their separate activities, the teams of "experts" from *Maccabi Hatzair* and *Hashomer Hatzair* had already attained a high degree of proficiency and accuracy in their work, as well as in the varied assortment of documents which they could produce. The *Maccabi Hatzair* craftsmen, headed by Vicki Fisher, were particularly competent in their familiarity with administrative procedures, and were therefore able to fill in all details with great skill. These qualities were an excellent supplement to the production abilities at the laboratory headed by David Gur, who has testifed that,

> At first Dan Zimmermann worked in temporary places, mostly in private flats; later he went to the dormitory for Jewish working youth on Zöldmáli Street. All the staff and the pupils there were members of *Hashomer Hatzair* . . . . Then the workshop for false papers moved ot the attic of the house at 12 Bethlen Street, where they opened an 'Art Studio.' The idea of using such a studio as a cover appealed to us immensely . . . . Efra Agmon undertook the work of filling in the forms and distributing them. A branch of the workshop was at this time located at 5 Nagyatádi-Szabó Street,

where Vicki Fisher presided over a conveyor belt system for the production of tenant registration certificates. The idea of an art studio was excellent but there was no end to the curiosity and imagination of the neighbors. They spread rumors to the effect that there was a secret broadcasting station in the studio, and the report reached the ears of the police. Fortunately for us, the police came when none of us were there. One of the well-intentioned neighbors gave us a confused, babbling account of what had happened. We fled at once, taking with us the choice equipment . . . .

After a while we set up the workshop in the flat of Zvi Herman Federit. Through him we met a Protestant minister who gave us a considerable quantity of blank birth, marriage, and baptismal certificates—most of them bearing authentic validations. We got original forms from a number of other sources as well, though in smaller quantities. For example, there was a gentile woman, widow of a Jew, who worked in the Bureau of Vital Statistics of the Third District. At the risk of both her freedom and her job, she used to show up faithfully at a rendezvous with members of the Resistance and would bring them genuine birth and marriage certificates.[17]

The place on Rózsa Street, which brought about the unification of the two groups which produced documents, was described by Peretz Révész:

A certain Italian offered to help us, for money. We found a place for the workshop on a quiet street. There were two rooms, one somewhat larger, and the other without windows, really ideal. Formerly, this had been an experimental laboratory to process soya as a meat substitute. We had no electricity, and worked by candlelight . . . . Only a small number of comrades from both movements knew where the place was, and we used all sorts of whistles and warning signals, according to the best traditions of the underground. Vicki Fischer was in charge. During the course of time we shifted the location of the laboratory about ten times.[18]

The story of how the laboratory was organized not only describes the human and technical aspects of the work of this tightly knit group, but also sheds light on how the entire set-up worked, and explains its multifaceted connections. Though the organization itself was unmistakably

associated with *Hashomer Hatzair,* it had a running connection with all the movements and with the Relief and Rescue Committee. In this, as in the matter of the *tiyul,* there were permanent and many-sided contacts with all elements in the Halutz Resistance. Furthermore, the opportunities which this laboratory placed in the hands of the Resistance were exploited for the benefit of many Jews who were not members of the Resistance, and even for help to local non-Jewish resistance organizations.

A rather queer situation developed at this stage. The laboratory reached the peak of its technical abilities precisely when the demand for its products reached a low ebb. This combination of circumstances may explain the rapidity with which the Resistance was able to adapt itself to the new conditions when the Arrow Cross took over the government, as well as the great interest which Hungarian resistance groups expressed in contacts with the Halutzim.

Some information on the Hungarian Resistance movements is necessary at this point. As a matter of fact, up to the last months of 1944 there was practically no such organization obviously engaged in Resistance activity. Organized opposition to pro-Nazi policies was limited to political bodies which operated in more or less legal manner until the invasion. The German occupation, it will be recalled, began with widespread arrests of all political elements who were apt to constitute a focus for opposition. It was only in May 1944, that the Magyar Front was established. This was a comprehensive, overall body which included anti-Nazi political figures of every hue, beginning with legitimist conservatives and ranging all the way to the communists.[19] The organization had no wing which was active on the level of a popular resistance. It was a head without a body. Ottó Komoly was the principal Jewish figure who maintained contact with these oppositionist elements. This relationship was of importance on the general political level only, and had almost no impact on the activities of the Halutz Resistance, certainly not before October 15.

As for the Hungarian Communist Party, it must be borne in mind that this party had been illegal since the counterrevolution of 1919. Thereafter it had existed in underground cells, which were relatively less affected by the mass arrests following the occupation. In any event this was an extremely small party, rent by internal dissension and in effect operating as two parties: One, the faction known as the Peace Party (*Béke párt*), had the blessing of Moscow; the other was headed by Pál Demény, and known

as the Party of Communists in Hungary (*Komunisták magyarországi pártja*), a name common before the Popular Front at the beginning of the 1930s. The Peace Party changed its name in September 1944, to the Communist Party (*Komunista párt*). During this period only those who were closely familiar with Marxist dialectic thought could distinguish between the two groups. At any rate, those who followed the Moscow line were the ones who wrote the history, with the result that the literature of the period refers to Demény and his people as a "sectarian" group.[20] In general, it appears that the latter were more strongly leftist than was dictated by the "line," which expounded a Popular Front, and later National Front policy. Despite this, the Demény group was more receptive to the Zionist cause.

The local Resistance movement was just getting underway in August 1944, with the result that the Halutz Resistance enjoyed a senior status, especially thanks to its great skill in furnishing all kinds of documents. A study of the mutuality of the contacts between the several groups reveals that the Hungarians provided principally shelter and hiding places, while the Halutzim furnished the legal cover. During August and September the laboratory was employed primarily in the service of the Hungarian resistance. In some cases the Hungarians were able to provide specimens of certificates which, after being copied, were made available to all sides. These were for the most part certificates attesting to employment in factories and enterprises vital to defense. Such employees were exempt from conscription. Only possession of such certificates could justify the presence of young men in Budapest during mobilization.

Another sort of contact was that with the group headed by Kálmán Rátz. He was a former Arrow Cross man. In 1944 he established the Independent Hungarian Socialist Party (*Független magyar szocialista párt*) which comprised rightists, socialists, and anti-Germans. He himself was arrested in March 1944, and was sent to Mauthausen but was freed and returned to Hungary in September.

There were also many Allied prisoners of war in Hungary, who had constituted a semi-underground until the occupation, and enjoyed the support of various local elements—some from the Hungarian left, and some from the conservative anti-Germans. In addition to these prisoners of war, there were a few dozen of Tito's partisans in Hungary. One such group of 37, headed by Anton Rob, a member of the Croatian Supreme Command,

was apprehended by Hungarian counterintelligence. In July 1944, the 37 were in a detention camp near the city of Székesfehérvár, where the Halutz Resistance established contact with them. Mimish Herbst was the liaison. In August he helped them to escape, provided them with papers, and secured a place for them to live in Budapest. Five of them succeeded in crossing through half of Hungary, while the war was still on, and safely reached their homeland. Later, through the Croatian legation in Budapest, the group furnished the Resistance with identification papers, including several authentic passports. The broad relations of the Resistance with all these groups became even closer especially after October 15.[21]

An understanding of the reasons for the absence of an anti-Nazi resistance in Hungary will also help to clarify one of the most basic issues, perhaps the most vital and most fundamental of all: a definition of the purpose of the Halutz Resistance. The need to choose between rescue and revolt faced all Jewish Resistance movements at various times and in various places throughout the Holocaust. In each case the decision was made according to the possibilities offered by prevailing local conditions. It is difficult to pin down any unequivocal process of decision-making in the Hungarian Halutz. The discussions were endless, but a close study indicates a clear preference for rescue over revolt. The basic elements required to fight were completely lacking in Hungary. Young men of 20 and over were practically all in the labor service. The remainder of the Jewish population was scattered and unorganized. The ghetto period, which in Poland had stretched over two or three years and served as the major source of resistance power, lasted only two or three weeks in Hungary, and these under the inhumane conditions of a transit camp. The gentile population was for the most part hostile to the Jews. Possible sources of supply for weapons were meager. There was no defeated, crumbling army, as in Poland, Yugoslavia, and France, and a source of weapons therefore did not exist. Geographical conditions in most of Hungary do not lend themselves to guerrilla warfare, even if all the other elements had been suitable. Above all, the sharp and sudden transformation from conditions of relative tranquility to the brutal and dizzying pace of the annihilation process, precluded any opportunity to organize a fighting resistance. The efforts to obtain weapons, to prepare bunkers, and to engage in similar activities were never pursued with the same scope and emphasis as the preparation of identification papers or organization

of the *tiyul.* The possibility of armed revolt always remained, of course, but only in the absence of all other courses of action.

The policies of the Halutz Resistance were formulated not only under the constraints of local conditions, but also according to instructions given by the representatives of the *Yishuv* in Palestine, or what the Resistance activists believed that the organized Jewish community in Palestine expected of them. Directions along these lines reached them in letters from Istanbul both before and after the occupation, and the advice always unequivocally emphasized the *tiyul* as the supreme objective. Before the occupation, the intention was primarily to bring refugees into Hungary; thereafter the need was to transfer the refugees from Hungary to Romania. A letter written from Istanbul on April 13, 1944—at a time when the dangers of the invasion had already become more or less obvious—systematically set forth eight points. Among them were financial matters, contact with Slovakia and Poland, and investigation of the possibilities of procuring Swiss protection documents. The point emphasized in the letter was "to protect the Halutz youth," an echo of Ben Gurion's words to the parachutists, as an expression of the Zionist hope that after the war the remaining Jews of Europe, and chief among them the Halutz-Zionist youth, would storm the gates of Palestine. In this letter there was not even the faintest suggestion of armed revolt.[22]

The same thoughts recur in other communications from Istanbul. On May 29, 1944, a few days after Joel Brand arrived in Istanbul, the delegation there, which already knew about both the ghettoization and the beginning of the deportations, wrote to the Relief and Rescue Committee, designating its tasks as relief work, rescue, encouragement to Jews, and aliyah—that is, immigration to Palestine. The youth movements and the refugees were asked to cooperate faithfully with the Committee. Another letter to the representatives of all the youth movements, on August 12, emphasized that their principal goal should be *aliyah* from Hungary.[23] Two letters to the *Haganah* Committee, both written before the invasion, make no mention of any possible need to prepare for armed revolt.[24] After the occupation the letters made no mention whatever of this Committee. The attitude of the representatives of the *Yishuv* and the point of view of the young people in Budapest were similar, and the two groups found encouragement in each other. The terms of reference, which grew

naturally out of the ideology, both in Istanbul and in Budapest, were as follows: Fulfillment of the Zionist ideal required people to construct and to establish the Jewish State after the war, and everything should therefore be done to assure that a Jewish population remained which could be drawn upon.

The *Tiyul* in effect provided an unequivocal response to all doubts. When the Resistance removed many of its people from Hungary, at a time when others were still considering alternative courses of action, it was actually specifying rescue as its goal, and rejecting any choice of hopeless revolt. The *tiyul* to Romania was a continuation of the movement southward which had begun two years earlier from Poland and Slovakia. It satisfied the requirements of Zionist policy at the time, as transmitted to Hungary. It also constituted an efficient exploitation of the limited possibilities available in Hungary, as the end of the war seemed to be approaching. In fact, it was the most comprehensive rescue operation during that period.

On the other hand, there were many comrades in the Resistance who were not pleased with this "rescue" line, which was gradually accepted to the exclusion of any possible attempts at revolt. To a certain extent there was a suppressed desire, in the membership of each movement, and in the heart of each comrade, to fight the German enemy. The indecision was difficult. Each of the activists had before him the example of the heroic stand in the Warsaw ghetto. The discussions on this issue continued from the very beginning until liberation. There were always some, especially among the Polish refugees who had remained in Hungary, who at one stage or another indicated that the moment had come to change the whole system.

A typical system of this ambivalent attitude to the possibility of revolt may be found in the constant efforts to acquire weapons for members of the Resistance, even without any clear idea how and when they were to be used. In his testimony, Yaakov Rosenberg described one of the ways in which arms were obtained early in 1944 when the Polish group was still in Mohács.[25] Through an intricate chain of circumstances, a chance contact was established between the Polish group and a high officer in the Hungarian army. The most important link in this chain was Peter, referred to in a previous chapter, and his friend, the officer whose villa was used as a hideaway. Through them Rosenberg met a senior officer

whose identity is unknown to this day, but who was apparently a baron. At a festive dinner Rosenberg was presented to him as the head of a Polish resistance group which needed arms. As a gesture of response, the baron invited Rosenberg to a hunting party at his estate in the Bácska area. There Rosenberg learned that the baron had connections with, or was one of the owners of, a munitions plant on Csepel Island. To begin with, the whole deal was purely commercial. The officer needed money, and in return was ready to supply arms in small quantities. Rosenberg obtained the funds from the treasury of the Relief and Rescue Committee through Pil, Rafi Benshalom, and Zvi Goldfarb.

The arms were passed on to the Halutz Resistance. Transactions like these took place throughout the entire period of the occupation. Many members of the Polish group were also involved and they helped to conceal the materiel at various stages. Members of the local Resistance also helped with transportation until the weapons finally reached the various bunkers. Considerable sums of money were paid out, and over a long period of time, so it is reasonable to assume that the members of the Committee knew very well what the money was being used for.

With the approach of the summer of 1944 the supply increased and included several cases of grenades and dozens of new pistols, rifles, and submachine guns of local manufacture. At about this time the transactions began to lose their purely commerical aspects, as some high-ranking Hungarian officers assisted the Resistance. The officers did not know the precise identity of that Resistance, but they had no doubts regarding its anti-German intentions. After August there was a further increase in the points of contact between the Halutz and the anti-Nazi, or anti-German Hungarians of both the right and the left.

The success of the landings in Normandy in June convinced many Hungarians that Germany was on the road to defeat, and that final surrender was only a matter of time. Romania's withdrawal from the Axis at the end of August strengthened these expectations. The general attitude toward the Jews served as a measure of the new and growing anti-German attitudes, just as it had at the beginning of the war, when the popular mood had been one of rejoicing at the "restoration of the lost territories." The change found expression not only in the incipient growth of underground anti-German activity, but also in the attitude of the Hungarian population toward the Jews, and of the political establishment toward the Jewish leadership.

The leadership of the Jewish Council during this time was chiefly in the hands of Samu Stern, Károly Wilhelm, and Ernő Pető. Komoly and Kasztner were the most prominent among the Zionist leaders. Most of the primary sources of information on this period are either oral testimony or written memoirs set down after the war. The exception is Komoly's diary, written as the events were occurring.

At the outset of the occupation the relationship of the Zionists, Kasztner and Komoly, with the leadership of the community was negligible, but the rescue transport project raised the prestige of the Zionist activity, and the contacts became closer. Between July and the middle of October, the cooperation became even stronger, and Komoly was in almost daily touch with the leaders of the Jewish Council. In many cases the representatives of the converts, who were at this time in a separate organization of their own, also participated in the meetings.[26]

Komoly's relations with the Hungarian authorities were very similar to those of the Jewish Council with the same authorities, and little difference can be found in the policies of either side. After each discussion or important development Komoly and the others exchanged information. The Jewish Council and Komoly were the principal contacts with the neutral representatives. It appears that during this time a more or less coordinated leadership crystallized, in which the Zionist members, though not dominant, exercised considerable weight. Any differences between the official leadership and the senior Zionist leadership seemed much less significant at this time than they had earlier or would later.

Another distinction was to be found within the Zionist camp in the differences between the policies of Kasztner and Krausz. In his report Kasztner noted three general areas of activity from the very beginning of the occupation. He wrote that the Hungarian line was directed by Komoly, the German line was managed by Brand and himself, and the third line—to obtain the support of the neutral states—was looked after by Krausz. This summary has been confirmed by additional testimony and by various researches.[27]

The above is perhaps an oversimplification. At any rate, on the day of the invasion Krausz took refuge in the Swiss legation. This reaction may be understood in view of the given circumstances, but it certainly cannot be called a policy of public rescue. It is true that while Krausz was in the Swiss legation he rendered an important service in that the information he conveyed to the Swiss met with a response.

Nevertheless, the most important activity during this period was that carried on by Kasztner and Brand, with the knowledge and approval of Komoly. Not until the beginning of July did it become possible to speak of a Hungarian line. Neither the community leaders nor Komoly could achieve any success on this level for reasons which have been taken up in previous chapters.

The situation changed early in July. Kasztner was still fully occupied with the rescue transport, but had no new rescue proposals—especially since it soon became clear that there would be no second transport. On the other hand, at this time Krausz was beginning to organize the program for passage through Romania, and work went ahead for preparation of the lists of names and issuance of the protective passes.[28]

One might gather from Kasztner's description that the three personalities mentioned commanded equal prestige. This was not so. Komoly, president of the Zionist Organization, was the predominant Zionist leader in Hungary, and was recognized as such both in general political circles and within the Zionist camp itself.

From a practical point of view, aside from the activities of the Halutz Resistance, there was never more than one major project under way at a time. Until the end of June this was the Kasztner transport. From the beginning of July it was the activity carried out at the office on Vadász Street. The so-called Hungarian line could not be compared to the others, since it consisted of political contacts which Komoly maintained in coordination with the community leaders. Kasztner participated in these, as did Krausz on occasions.

The chief issue which occupied the Jewish leadership at this time was the danger that the Jews of Budapest would be gathered in camps in western Hungary. A program to this effect had indeed been put forward as an alternative to the German demand that the deportations be continued. The danger was very real, not only during July and August, but also after the Lakatos government came into power. Several dates were set for the commencement of this concentration of Budapest's Jews in the Komárom region in the western part of Hungary, but there is no evidence that any preparations were made at the place for the reception of tens of thousands of people. There was no lack of rumors at this time, but the peril of the transfer to a Hungarian concentration camp was more than a rumor. Knowing this, the Zionist leadership was in a constant

state of uncertainty. No one could be certain that if the population were indeed moved, such move would be halted within the boundaries of Hungary. Nevertheless, it is difficult to find any expressions of clear and consistent Jewish resistance to the removal of the population from Budapest. Attempts were made by many, among them Komoly, not so much to prevent the evacuation of Budapest, as to ensure that it would be done in a humane manner, and that the people would not be sent out of Hungary.[29] No evidence, however, has been found to indicate that the leaders of the Resistance knew of the danger of this deportation, and it must therefore be assumed that the information was never brought to their attention.

The subject of deportation of the Jews of Budapest was taken up by the Hungarian government on August 2. The discussion definitely linked the deportation program with the possibility of a limited emigration through the good offices of the Swedish and Swiss legations: "The Germans will permit the emigration to Switzerland and Sweden of a limited number of Jews, only on condition that deportations of the Jews of Hungary be resumed—that is, of those remaining in Budapest."[30] On August 19, Edmund Veesenmayer announced that August 28 had been fixed as the date for beginning of the concentration of Budapest's Jews in camps, but no date had yet been set for their deportation out of Hungary. At the same time he also announced that Eichmann's *Kommando* "no longer sees any need for it to remain in Hungary." Nevertheless, the Hungarians took no steps to implement the plan, and only at the end of August was an officer appointed to seek a suitable place for the camp. Despite all this, the official Jewish newspaper was compelled to report on September 7 that a conscription was anticipated of persons of both sexes between the ages of 14 and 70. This was the legal camouflage for the expected deportation.[31]

During the summer Komoly established first contact with Friedrich Born, the new representative of the International Red Cross. Born also served as the medium through whom the Joint Distribution Committee sent funds from Switzerland into Hungary. Most of the money reached the hands of the Jewish Council, and a lesser amount financed Kasztner's activities. Born also introduced a number of proposals which held out great promise for the future. For one thing, he reported that the Spanish Red Cross was prepared, apparently in the wake of the Horthy offer

to receive 500 children from Hungary—Jews and non-Jews—together with a number of escorts.[32] The composition of the group was to be coordinated between the Jewish Council and the Organization of Jewish Christians. It was also reported that if the Jews of Budapest were to be sent to concentration camps in Hungary, the International Red Cross was prepared to extend its protection to them. Born had an immediate practical proposal: advance preparation of Red Cross signs in German, French, and Hungarian, to be posted in the camps as well as the Yellow-Star houses within Budapest. Considering that the Red Cross had hitherto refused to exercise its influence in the matter of the camps in Poland and elsewhere, but had concentrated only on prisoners of war, it can be seen that these new proposals were a far-reaching departure on the part of the international body.

Born offered Komoly the use of an office in the International Red Cross headquarters at 4 Mérleg Street to be used to prepare the shipment of children to Spanish Tangier. This was to become Department A.

It is not clear why the proposal to extend international immunity to the Yellow-Star houses was not implemented. It is not known if the suggestion was ever seriously put before the government, and if so, what its reaction was. Undoubtedly this was the source of the idea that the Red Cross could successfully extend its patronage to a group of children. Later the same idea was expanded and broadened into an efficient operation most of which was organized by the Halutz.

Komoly's connections with Hungarian personalities during this period were wideranging. He was in almost daily contact with Miklós Mester, a secretary of state in the Ministry of Education and Religion. Mester, a member of the Imrédy party, had become disullusioned by the pro-Nazi policies, and was at this time a vital link in the relations between the Jewish leadership and elements in the Hungarian government. He was well informed and had excellent connections. Another important personality was a minister, the Reverend Albert Bereczky, who served as liaison between the Reformed Churches and the Magyar Front.

Both Komoly and the leaders of the Jewish Council met with the Regent's son, Miklós Horthy Jr., who headed the "extrication office" (*Kiugrási iroda*) which sought ways of getting Hungary out of the war. Samu Stern, the head of the Council, was even secretly received by the Regent himself.[33]

Budapest's Jews never were sent to concentration camps, and all who were willing to be in touch with the Jews apparently did so because they were of the opinion that in effect the war was approaching its end. The rapid advance of the Soviet army, especially after the surrender of Romania, heightened the feeling that this was the end of an era. Komoly, for example, devoted at least half his time to discussion of political affairs, both general and Jewish. At the heart of these talks were problems of government administration after the war.

One topic which came up in almost every talk with Mester and also with Albert Bereczky was their fear that when liberation came the Jews might seek vengeance. This fear was a result of the trauma left by the Béla Kun government in 1919 which had, through all the years, been presented by nationalist and anti-Semitic propaganda as a bloody and vindictive regime. At a time when the threat of deportations was still very real, both Mester and Bereczky, acting in the name of the political establishment, were seeking solutions to a problem that did not exist. Komoly recorded at the time that Bereczky had even initiated a meeting with a group of Neolog rabbis for a discussion of this subject. Komoly wrote that he felt uneasy after that meeting, especially in the light of the comments by the Jewish participants.

No one had any clear idea how matters would develop in the near future, nor what conditions would be like in the country, but everyone believed that in one form or another the Jews of Hungary would be at the very center of political activity. Logic dictated that under any circumstances the rule would be in the hands of those who had not collaborated with the Germans—and who could be more qualified from that point of view than the Jews? Joel Palgi's tale of the political prisoners who were "setting up governments" at this time was a further example of the general feeling of "the end of an era."

Another subject that occupied Komoly was the matter of the Jewish prisoners. Enormous efforts were made to obtain the release of those who had been arrested following the proclamation to the Hungarian public at the end of June. Among these were Fábián Herskovits, who had been close to Zionism. With the opening of the office on Vadász Street, he had been employed as an official in the Swiss legation, and had been arrested in August. After interrogation he was transferred to the prison on Fő Street together with two teachers who had been involved with him. Komoly,

together with the Swiss legation officers and Pető of the Jewish Council, was able to obtain their release. During all this time Komoly made no mention of the parachutists who were being held in the same prison.[34]

Latent conflicts and antagonisms usually come to the surface during periods free from tension. The personalities here were no exception. Both Kasztner and the members of the Halutz Resistance wrote of the minor changes which took place in the three "lines" of operation. Despite all efforts, no understanding was reached between Kasztner and Krausz. It was therefore arranged that Rafi Benshalom would work in the office at Vadász Street, while Peretz Révész would maintain the contact with the Rescue Committee.[35] In effect, the conflict was between the philosophy and method of operation of Krausz, and the outlook of the Resistance. The personal relations between Krasztner and Krausz were very bad. Both Komoly and the youth leaders sought in vain to smooth things over.[36]

In the summer of 1944, Komoly was the key figure in the uppermost political echelons, while Moshe Krausz was the central personality in the effort to organize legal *aliyah* through Romania, with the approval of the German authorities. The many letters and telegrams available indicate that Krausz was convinced he would succeed with "his" *aliyah,* just as Kasztner had succeeded with "his" transport. The representatives of the *Yishuv* in Palestine, stationed in Turkey and in Switzerland, were also involved in these efforts. Chief among them was Haim Barlas, who represented the Palestine office in Istanbul and was responsible for liaison with Krausz, as well as with the SS in Budapest and the German Foreign Ministry.[37]

Internal German and Hungarian documents make it clear that the Germans never made an unequivocal commitment that the proposed group would leave. Nevertheless, Krausz was positive that at least 2,000 would be permitted to go, and he instructed his office to proceed with the seating arrangements on the train. It is true that the Gemans always left the door open for discussion of the matter, and kept it on the agenda even after the route through Romania had been blocked. On September 4, Krausz informed Komoly, in Lutz's name, that the Germans were ready to permit emigration through Belgrade, but on condition that "the Hungarian goverment send the first transport to Jewish concentration camps." The practical interpretation of this, of course, was resumption of the deportations. In other internal documents the Germans specifically

made their consent to emigration dependent on renewal of the deportations.[38]

Special note must be taken of the contacts established by *Hashomer Hatzair* with the Communist underground, parallel with the major political dealings carried on by Komoly. These contacts were a result of personal acquaintanceships and of social relations developed with a group of left wing intellectuals who were an important link in the chain of political relationships. Some members of the movement were also active in trade union circles, and established a relationship there with activists from the Communist underground. It appears that *Hashomer Hatzair* was the only group engaged in this effort, but its members felt they were acting on behalf of all the wings of the Resistance. The situation seemed clear and unmistakable to them: "The Nazi rule is about to end, and the old regime will collapse with it. The Communist will take over the government. Pursuant to this conclusion, we have begun ideological discussions with them."[39]

During this tranquil period, it was considered important to convince the Communists that Zionism was a progressive movement, so that when the Communists attained power they would permit Zionist activity. Such discussions were held with both the Demény group and the faction that followed the Moscow line. The Demény party was more flexible on the Jewish issue than those who followed the Moscow line but consistently opposed Zionism in principle.

Komoly's activity on the higher political levels resulted in contacts no less important. At this time the Communists sought to create an image as a reasonable group which could be negotiated with. Through his relations with foes of the regime and Magyar Front circles, Komoly met with leaders of the Communist underground. A former member of *Hashomer Hatzair,* György Aczél was an important figure in these talks, and during the summer of 1944 he was the chief liaison for Komoly and Kasztner with the Communist underground.[40]

The Halutz Resistance did not succeed in changing the views of the Communist International with regard to Zionism, but the personal contacts established at this time were of great help, at least during the period immediately after liberation. From a practical point of view, there was great value even to the minimal help which the contacts with the Communists provided, principally in return for the greater assistance which

the Resistance gave to the Communists, especially in furnishing false papers. The value of such contacts, more than proved themselves during the Arrow Cross period.

Regarding the numerical strength of the Resistance, it has already been noted that in March it had about 600 members. In the following three months, additional comrades reached the capital. Some of them joined the ranks in Budapest, filing the places of those who had gone on *tiyul.* Others set out for Romania. A conservative estimate would place the number of those who reached Budapest at about 1000; an equal number left for Romania. The Kasztner transport at the end of June carried about 250 members of the Halutz movements, including *Betar.* Additional young people continued to join the ranks of the labor service units.

Therefore, the number of those active in the Resistance during the summer was even smaller than the number in March. Among those leaving on *tiyul* was a small group of Resistance members who had deserted their labor service units. The majority were unaffiliated Jews who had simply found their way to the Resistance. The end of the *tiyul* at the end of August resulted in a small rise in the number of activists, but a substantial increase would not take place until October 15, when there were mass desertions from the labor service. Many joined the Resistance, and the number grew further with the addition of members who were released or escaped from jail at the end of Horthy's regime. Thus, the number of people associated with the Resistance changed with great frequency; it revolved around a more or less firm nucleus of the few dozen leaders of the various movements. As will be seen later, only a very few persons were active from the beginning until liberation.

CHAPTER 9

OCTOBER 15

After prolonged hesitation and doubts, as well as fruitless negotiations with the Soviets, the Regent made the dramatic announcement on October 15 that Hungary was laying down its arms and accepting the ceasefire terms proposed by the Russians. The announcement was received by the Jews of Budapest with an outburst of joy. The illusion of salvation lasted less than a day, however. The Germans installed the Arrow Cross Party in power, with Ferenc Szálasi as its head, and he at once proclaimed that the war would go on.[1]

By removing Horthy, and placing the government in the hands of the local Fascists and the frustrated mobs, the Germans assured that Hungary would remain in the war at this critical time when the front was already at its borders. This was the most important sociopolitical revolution in Hungary since the Communist regime of 1919. For the Jews who still remained in Budapest it marked the beginning of what would be their supreme test.

For a proper understanding of what this change meant, it must be recalled that German policy toward the Fascist parties in Eastern Europe was consistently based on what was in the best interests of Germany. For lack of any alternative, the Germans handed over power to the local Fascist forces only in the new satellite states, like Slovakia and Croatia. In stable countries with a traditional right-wing leader prepared to support

Germany's foreign policy, they relied on him rather than on the hot-tempered and excitable local National Socialists. Thus they made possible Antonescu's elimination of the Iron Cross in Romania.

Their attitude toward the Hungarian Arrow Cross had been similar up to October 15. Even a matter so central to Germany's policy as the Final Solution, was subject to compromise, as was evident from the fact that Budapest Jewry were almost untouched up to October 15. However, the military situation was becoming critical, especially after the Romanian withdrawal from the Axis, a move which caused the German army to suffer heavy casualties and to lose strategic control over the Carpathians. Early in October the Red Army penetrated into Hungary itself. The towns of Kolozsvár and Nagyvárad fell, and the battle raged around the Hungarian city of Debrecen. Its conquest would expose the Hungarian plains to the Soviets and in effect open the road to Budapest. If the Hungarians laid down their arms, the Red Army would have swept to the Austrian border within a few days.

Unlike what had occurred in Romania two months earlier, the Germans were not caught by surprise in Hungary. Ministers in Horthy's government kept them informed of every step taken by the Regent. The Nazis were willing to let Horthy continue in office only if he would refrain from openly opposing continuation of the war. A special emissary sent by Hitler reached Hungary on October 13, but the last-minute diplomatic effort did not succeed. To retain what was virtually their last ally, the Germans handed the rule over to Szálasi.

The first and most important function of the new government was, of course, to satisfy German anticipations and to do everything possible not only to continue the conflict, but even to increase Hungary's participation in it. Szálasi's government did indeed meet Germany's expectations to no small degree. The army continued to fight and the civil administration continued to operate more or less in a normal manner. Industrial production was hardly affected. The soldiers, civil service, and the laborers remained at their posts—all of which was a matter of supreme importance to the Germans.

However, it would be a mistake to regard this regime as only an oblique arm of the Germans. Szálasi and his people had their own aspirations and were supported by a party which was itself a sociopolitical body. This new government elevated these social elements to power. Although this

was a coalition government, with the participation of other extreme right parties, the Arrow Cross was the only party which had a broadly based mass following, and it was therefore able to determine the character of the regime. The party commanded the support of the lowest classes of the common people. As early as 1939 it already had 300,000 members and twice that number of supporters. Immediately upon Szálasi's assumption of power, armed units of the party (*pártszolgálat*) seized control of the streets of the capital and were in effect in complete command there.

The Arrow Cross government reorganized what became commonly known as the "Hungarian Gestapo," headed by Péter Hain and his deputy, the infamous László Koltay, so as to "deal with" political foes and with Jews who were in hiding.

By placing the rabble in charge of the government, the Arrow Cross effected a major social revolution. Although most of the government civil servants remained at their desks—only a few were replaced by party members—the constant presence of armed bands was a disturbing influence on normal and stable administrative procedures in Budapest. No one knew any longer what was legal and what was illegal; who had been arrested and why, and who had been freed and for how long. This took place in a city which was under almost daily aerial bombardment, with the fighting front drawing ever closer. The instability of the regime increased even more at the end of November when the Szálasi government began to evacuate westward both industrial enterprises and government institutions. Anarchy reached its peak on Christmas Eve, 1944, when the city was surrounded.

Even during the relatively tranquil period of July to September, the plight of Budapest's Jews was unclear, and their security even more uncertain than they themselves realized. It should be kept in mind that the anti-Jewish legislation had not been rescinded, and the Jews were still concentrated in the Yellow Star houses, lacking in mobility, economic means of existence and basic civil rights. This situation could by no means be compared with conditions before the German occupation. Now any change in policy or regime could result in immediate Holocaust. The Jews of Budapest, and to an extent even the Halutz Resistance, who had been lulled into a false sense of security, found the very foundations of their self-assurance badly undermined.

Two factors still sustained the illusion: the military situation, which indicated that the Nazi regime was rapidly approaching its end, and the

growing improvement in attitude toward the Jews on the part of appreciable sections of the population. There was no doubt that this change was directly influenced by the fact that the battle front was coming closer. More and more Hungarians began to perceive that Germany had lost all hope of winning the war, a realization which affected the attitude toward the Jews not only by official circles, but also by the man in the street. The general atmosphere appeared unchanged, even after the Arrow Cross came to power, but the reality was that all political barriers which had previously prevented the renewal of the deportations had now disappeared. The Arrow Cross considered that the purging of Hungary of all Jews was one of its major goals, and not just a submission to the dictates of the Germans.

The first step of the new regime was to forbid the Jews from leaving their homes—even invalids and pregnant women. Physicians were forbidden to visit, and even corpses could not be taken out for burial. This situation continued for a week. The ban on appearing on the streets was still in effect when a new edict was issued calling for conscription of all Jewish males between the ages of 16 and 60, and all females between 18 and 40. The people were ordered to report at the race tracks, and some of them were taken from there to the brick factory outside the town. The deportations were resumed on October 21. One of the most difficult and most shocking chapters in the destruction of Hungarian Jewry was the death march westward, in which tens of thousands of people, most of them women, took part. There were still about 150,000 Jews in Budapest and an equal number in the labor service units scattered throughout the country.

Activity of the Resistance had been relatively slack during the weeks which preceded October 15. After the *tiyul* had been discontinued, many of the original activists were no longer around. Some of them were still serving in the labor service, since there seemed to be no immediate danger of deportation, and any way of leaving Hungary was effectively blocked. Others were in prison. Only a very few of the Resistance people in Budapest were prepared for the worst, but even these never imagined what was to happen after October 15. The rapidity of the change in their condition was described by Resistance members in a letter to Geneva dated October 26:

> Only ten days ago we were still considering reorganization of the Zionist movement and the establishment of new branches in Budapest. We had already begun to assemble abandoned children and to prepare programs educating them for their *aliyah* . . . . We had prepared a seminar for seniors, gathered material, and had begun to write the programs . . . . We believed that we had put behind us the period of being imposters, forgers, smugglers, of living like hunted rats and animals . . . . But all our illusions collapsed like a house of cards . . . . Everything was completely unexpected.[2]

It is clear that the feeling that the worst was over was rife in the Resistance too. Again, as on the day of the German invasion six months earlier, they faced the unknown. The two situations were quite different, of course, but the psychological impact of the two events was similar. A period of quiet activity and a feeling of assumed security, without tension of immediate danger, was suddenly followed by the very real threat of annihilation, and in the case of Budapest itself, certainly more terrifying than anything that had gone before.

During the period of relative calm the Resistance members had continued with their production of false papers and had even perfected the processes. The presence of dozens of activists in the Resistance required a constant and orderly supply of new identification papers from time to time. To this was added the making of documents for persons and groups outside the Resistance, Jews and especially non-Jews. The Resistance was now much better organized and more experienced than it had been seven months earlier, but it was still lacking in personnel to carry out meaningful activities.

The most valuable human material now being added to the ranks of the Resistance came first and foremost from the members of the local movements, some of them veteran activists—many in their late twenties and early thirties—who had been imprisoned and then released, or had escaped at the end of September and early in October. The leadership of the Resistance was enriched by their practical experience. The existing cadres, with the addition of this high-quality manpower, provided a sound organizational base for the absorption of dozens of additional comrades from the local movements who were in the labor service units, and with whom contact had been maintained constantly. Thus the Halutz Resistance was able

to face the last months of the war in the capital with an organization of hundreds of activists.

This entire period between October 1944 and January 1945 was marked by a combination of conditions and events. First was the disintegration of the central authority, which found expression in anarchy and violence toward the Jews. Second was the approach of the front line, which resulted in a condition of siege, or near-siege, shortly after the political change. Third was the creation of utterly new instruments by locally-based international bodies. Finally, the entire period was quite short.

The interest taken by various international elements began to have practical results immediately following deportations of the Jews from the provincial towns. These bodies were for the most part the same ones which had led Horthy to halt the deportations. The distribution of the protective passes by the various legations, and the efforts of the International Red Cross to organize an orderly emigration of children, both had the formal approval of the Hungarian government. These agencies capitalized on this special status to intervene with the authorities on behalf of individual Jews. Such was the situation when Szálasi took over. Inasmuch as Hungary's diplomatic emissaries abroad refused to recognize the new regime and to represent it in the neutral states, the Arrow Cross was particularly interested in securing the diplomatic recognition of the neutral states. After some initial delay, therefore, the new government ratified all the privileges which the previous regime had granted to the neutral legations in Budapest.

In contrast to the situation during the first months of the occupation, when the Resistance had to create a structure for its activity, this time there was already a legal framework under the protection of the neutral legations and the International Red Cross. These instruments resulted from efforts by the senior leadership, rather than of the Resistance, but thanks to the activity of the members of the Halutz Resistance, they were transformed into a means for mass rescue.

The period of the Arrow Cross rule, more than any other time, was marked by conditions which conformed to the Resistance's methods of operation. The first instinctive reaction of the activists was an attempt to gather together at once most of the activists who were scattered throughout the capital. This operation began without delay on October 16 at an hour when no Jew was permitted to be abroad. The only ones who enjoyed

freedom of movement were those who possessed documents and uniforms of the Arrow Cross. Those local Halutzim who were able to walk the streets and to behave like authentic members of the Arrow Cross were therefore of enormous value.

Joseph Meyer (Megyeri), one of the few local members of the movement who had lived in the underground even before the arrival of the Germans, had broad connections in various political circles, some of them illegal. It is interesting to note that in these circles there were some who had previously been members of extreme right-wing parties, but during this period had become close to the left, and were even ready to help the Jews. Meyer told of what went on during those times:

> The events of October 15 compelled us to organize as quickly as possible to face the new conditions. That very evening I already renewed my contact with a political group which had withdrawn from the Arrow Cross Party, and was operating under the name of the Independent Socialist Party. It was headed by a retired colonel, Kálmán Rátz, a former member of the Hungarian parliament. . . . May acquaintanceship with him went back to the days when the Arrow Cross was in the underground. They gave me some chevrons of the Arrow Cross militia (*pártszolgálat*), a few badges and hats. In those days even veteran party members did not have insignia such as these. The next day several members of the Halutz Resistance went about their rescue work, wearing these insignia, and taking advantage of the general confusion. . . . Our first decision was to get together all the comrades who could take part in activities, and try to extricate them from the Yellow Star houses where they were confined. We drew up lists and divided into groups of two to carry out our mission.[3]

Another case was that of Zvi Reich (Nadivi), who from the very first days also began to operate in an Arrow Cross uniform.[4] He had obtained his documents during the summer when, as a member of the labor service unit, he was taken by the police to move cases of documents which had been confiscated from one of the Arrow Cross offices. He seized the opportunity to slip a number of the authentic certificates under his shirt and added some blank forms and a rubber stamp in addition. Within a few

days after the takeover, he had outfitted some dozens of Resistance members with Arrow Cross papers and uniforms. The identification papers were easier to falsify than most of the official papers, which of course, made the impersonations easier. All the equipment including the party's symbolic green shirt could be purchased without great difficulty at Budapest's flea market in Teleki Square. A story which recurs in several testimonies illustrates the situation in which the Resistance now found itself:

> We were walking quietly along Erzsébet Avenue, headed for our next job, when we were suddenly accosted by two rowdies, about 14 or 15 years of age. One of them turned to Efra: '. . . Aren't you by chance from Kisvárda, and isn't your name Teichman? . . . . That's the name of our neighbors there . . . . ' Efra denied it all, and I tried to change the subject. [I said] 'Why are you hanging around in the street here? Come over to 60 Andrássy Avenue. [General Headquarters of the Arrow Cross Party in Budapest—A.C.] Ask for me and I'll give you something to do!' The two boys did not give up, and continued to accompany us. We sought to leave the main avenue, but at this point the two kids found a member of the *Levente* [armed paramilitary units—A.C.] and hastened to inform on us. We accelerated our pace, and from behind heard the sound of a rifle being cocked. The Levente guy brandished his gun and ran after us. Suddenly we heard him say: 'The kids have squealed on you!' One of the lads had indeed identified Efra. We turned around, and to our great surprise realized that the armed Levente man was none other than Bezalel, a member of *Dror.* The three of us continued walking. There was a soldier stationed at the other end of the square, and just to be on the safe side, the kids told him, too, about us . . . . The soldier turned out to be Patyu, also a member of *Dror.* Apparently they were getting ready for something in the vicinity. Now the four of us continued walking in a ludicrous and confusing situation: first, two 'members' of the Arrow Cross, followed by two men carrying rifles, and about twenty meters behind, the two kids who wanted to see what was going to happen. We reached the Western Railroad Station, and here we decided to act. A railroad worker on a motorcycle came toward us and Efra stopped him. He held a higher rank than the motorcyclist. He ascertained which way the

> cyclist was going, declared he was going the same way, and requested a ride. Efra vanished at a rapid clip. I ran in the opposite direction, and the riflemen from *Dror* also ran off in different directions. And thus our problems were solved.[5]

In all these cases there was no actual infiltration into the ranks of the party, but rather an exploitation of the confusion which reigned in the streets and the utter lack of control over armed personnel who, in effect, had unlimited control of the capital. No one really knew who had authority to arrest anyone. There was no coordination between the various wings of the government and the party, and not even between a party unit from one quarter and their comrades from the neighboring quarter.

These first activities immediately raised two questions which had to be solved at once: the problem of what to do with members of the movements who had been removed from the Yellow Star houses, and the problem of central management of the Resistance's activities. It was at this stage that the small "glass house" building at 29 Vadász Street began to assume major importance.

The offices on the upper floor were busy with the preparation for the emigration. The ground floor and the large basement contained the merchandise storerooms. At the beginning of the Szálasi regime the large attic served as residence for a considerable number of Halutz activists. There was also a yard and a rear warehouse with quite a large basement.

Moshe Krausz, secretary of the Palestine Office, was in charge. The clerical work involved in the planned *aliyah,* which was the justification for opening the office, was carried out by a staff of Zionist officials headed by Mihály Salamon, who was then serving his turn as chairman of the Palestine Office. Later he became president of the Hungarian Zionist Organization. An examination of the list of employees in the building reveals that only a few of them had previously been Zionists, and these were for the most part aged or senior workers. None of them came from the ranks of the youth movements active in the Resistance.[6]

The Committee of the Palestine Office was not active at all in the preparation of the lists. The actual administration was entirely in Krausz's hands. In addition, there was a growing increase in the personal influence exercised by those who were quite remote from any Zionist activity. This was especially true of Arthur Weiss, the owner of the property, whose

private office was also in the building, and the attorney, Rudolf Mezei. In the absence of Krausz, who spent much time in the legation itself, these two conducted the day-to-day affairs. The staff was occupied with preparations of the lists of those to depart, reception of the public, issuance of certifications and the like. Within a short time the staff was joined by a number of women from WIZO (Women's International Zionist Organization), who performed much of the technical work, like typing. It is important to bear in mind that all this activity was legal, and under the auspices of the Swiss legation. The Consul in charge of the Representation of Foreign Interests, Charles Lutz, made frequent personal appearances in the place.

Mezei was also active in liaisons with Hungarian government officials, and his wide circle of acquaintances and his contacts with the authorities, going back to the days when he was a lawyer and director of a bank, were of great value.

The Resistance youth from the very beginning, however, regarded the establishment of the Representation in an entirely different light. They were in need of a fixed address from where they could carry out their illegal activities. However, their status was uncertain and undefined. They were represented on the Committee of the Palestine Office, but the functions of this body were theoretical only, and the presence of the young people created problems. The personal relations between most of the Resistance activists and Moshe Krausz, bad as they had been in the past, became even more bitter. The Halutzim had no common language with either Weiss or Mezei. Matters reached such an impasse that at times attempts were made to prevent their entry into the place. The personal intervention of Ottó Komoly was necessary more than once to prevent even sharper clashes.[7]

The principal cause of the conflict between the two sides resulted from the contradiction in attitudes with regard to use of the benefits which the building conferred, and the protection it afforded. However, matters were exacerbated even more because of the generation gap and the different character, background, and outlooks of the two sides. On the one hand, the youth movement personnel had succeeded in establishing their "offical" office there for emigration of the youth, thus legitimizing their presence. Rafi Benshalom was the head of the office. On the other hand, the adults carried on their activity, and by their efforts succeeded in

maintaining official and respectable external appearance even under the difficult conditions at the beginning of the Szálasi regime.

Partial and temporary rescue, with local or German approval, was nothing new. To the contrary, this was part of the system employed by the Germans back in Poland, when they exempted from deportation certain segments of the population, those bearing special certificates, work permits, or foreign passports. Later it became clear that these were only temporary deferrals. The Germans even set up special camps in various places in Europe for Jews with foreign passports, even though it was quite obvious that they were not citizens of the countries whose passports they held. The Kasztner transport may be seen as part of this effort. What was common to all these cases was that they always applied to a relatively small number of Jews. The decision as to which Jews were to be selected for exemption from annihilation was not determined by the Germans themselves who considered items like these to be of little import. They permitted the Jews to conduct their own internal quarrels among themselves.

If the affairs at the office on Vadász Street had continued to be conducted as they were before the Arrow Cross took over, the results might well have been as poor as before, even if Krausz's plan had succeeded. What actually happened was quite different. The Glass House quickly became not only a center for limited and official rescue program with governmental approval, but also a focal point for illegal activities carried out on the initiative of the Resistance.

When Horthy proclaimed the short-lived ceasefire, the staff of the Glass House were not at their desks—it was Sunday. The following day, when the Arrow Cross seized power and conditions in the streets were unclear, Jews were forbidden to leave their homes. Although the staff members had previously been exempt from wearing the Yellow Star, most of them hesitated to go out on the streets because of the unstable conditions and the lack of security. It was only two or three days later that members of the staff began to return to ascertain what could now be done. The general atmosphere was such that those who did manage to reach the building hesitated to go out again, preferring to remain under Swiss protection. Even more, they regarded the security of the place as justification for bringing their families there as well.

The transformation of the Glass House into a dwelling place and a refuge from the renewed deportations was an instinctive reaction by those who

worked there, as well as by some of the youth movements in the Resistance. The latter, taken by surprise by Szálasi's political upheaval, at once began to remove their comrades from the Jewish buildings. Most of them had no place to go. They were not accustomed to life in the underground and could not fend for themselves even if they were provided with the best Aryan documents. These were brought to Vadász Street as a temporary measure. When they became aware that the new regime was honoring the extraterritorial status of the office, the Resistance systematically began to bring their people there, and to prepare a list of Zionist leaders still in Budapest, who could also be brought to the building. Mihály Salamon tells in his book how two *Bnai Akiva* boys appeared at his home, in Arrow Cross uniforms, to take him and his family to Vadász Street.[8]

The number of residents there grew daily. At first there were only the staff of the building and their immediate families, and some members of the youth movements. To these were added the parents of the staff and the parents of the Resistance members, as well as other Jews who had fled from the labor service. Soon other family members began to appear, friends, acquaintances, indeed anyone with a little pull or sharp elbows. Within a week or two the building was full, and by the beginning of November there were close to 2000 residents.

From this point on primary emphasis was placed on maintaining the external appearance of the building and on avoiding anything which might attract special attention. During the day the offices were kept free of people, but at night those very rooms became dormitories. Furthermore, the nature of the house was determined by the character of the Zionist movements, with all their internal political differences that were so characteristic of the period. Without any particular advance decision, the building was almost naturally divided into the *Hashomer Hatzair* basement, which also included the comrades of *Dror* and *Maccabi Hatzair,* the *Hanoar Hatzioni* attic and the Orthodox cellar, which included both adult Zionists and the members of *Bnai Akiva.* Each movement took care of its own members and arranged places for them. Those who were not members of any movement temporarily joined up with one of the groups, or found their own individual sleeping accommodations in one of the offices, in the corridor, or on the stairway.

The experience of the first week after the political upheaval revealed that the new government, at least for the time being, was honoring the

status of the "representation" as well as the protective passes which it issued. A Jew who could present such credentials, that is a *Schutzpass* of one of the legations, was in a preferential position, and usually avoided deportation. Within a few days, therefore, thousands of people—hearing the news—began to throng the portals of the Glass House. Jews came not only as individuals, but also as representatives of labor service units, accompanied by Hungarian staff members, and with lists of members of entire units. Hundreds of Jews managed to squeeze into the building, and thousands waited outside, each intent on saving his life.

Organization of life within the building became an urgent problem. Despite its extraterritorial status, policemen and Arrow Cross personnel appeared at the building quite frequently, and the pretention that this was a normal office had to be maintained although some 2000 persons were already permanently resident there. The question was now, how to feed and maintain this vast population. At the beginning, some of the people dared to go out and take care of their own needs. Some of the Budapest people, and especially the well-to-do ones, had personal contacts with gentiles. They had friends or domestic help who brought them food daily. The problem was particularly acute for the Halutzim, who had no such connections, and especially for the members of the labor service, whose families had all been deported from the provincial towns. The feedign of so many people was no simple matter, particularly since no preparations whatever had been made and none of the necessary equipment had been provided.

During all this time the relations continued to be tense between Krausz and his people, and the Halutz Resistance. The distribution of the protective passes became a source of controversy—an extension of the fundamental differences of opinion as to how to exploit the rescue possibilities which these documents provided. The staff of the building found itself unable to restrict the passes to the number which had been permitted and they began to issue additional passes, in a limited number, and under careful supervision and registration.[9] The Halutzim, on the other hand—who had long since abandoned any effort at legitimacy in their relations with the authorities—demanded that such documents be issued on an unrestricted basis to all who requested them. They based their demand on the principle that it was not the function of Jews to determine who should be rescued and who should not. There was also a practical aspect of the

matter. The entire machinery of government was in a state of disintegration. The Red Army was already at the gates of Budapest. One did not have to be a military expert to understand that the Fascist regime could last only a few more weeks at most. Yet the deportations were continuing at the rate of thousands of people a day. Though they were no longer being sent to Auschwitz, but to work camps in Germany, there was no doubt that these were almost certain death sentences. In most cases, the protective passes prevented the deportation of their individual bearers, as well as entire units of the labor service. This was what spurred the Resistance on to mass production of false passes. It was clear to all that the more of these documents that were in circulation, the greater were the chances of saving more Jews.

Rafi Benshalom, writing to Geneva, compared the first month of activity after Szálasi's rise to power with the period immediately following the German invasion. He wrote: "We have issued large numbers of false *Schutzpässe.* Our effort has met with great success. This is the first time, incidentally, that we are in truth successfully saving the lives of masses of Jews."[10] The leaders of the Resistance already had the clear feeling that a new era had begun in the work of the Resistance, an era of mass rescue.

In the period following October 15, the Glass House became the nerve center for the activities of the Resistance, and most of its projects originated there. Later a certain decentralization was put into effect, and each movement had its own center, usually in various offices which enjoyed the protection of the International Red Cross. In each case there was effective coordination, insofar as possible, and the leadership of the Resistance exercised full control over its people. Even activities which were individual in nature—and during this time there was great value to individual initiative—were carried out in accordance with the guidance of headquarters and under its direction.

Members of the movements in the Resistance were divided into four major groups, in accordance with their location and their rescue tasks. The largest group of all was located in one of the buildings of the Swiss legation. Most of these were not active, or active only to a small degree. Some of them were occasionally dispatched to perform various rescue tasks, but most of the time they simply remained in the protected building. The second group was composed of those in bunkers. Details of their activity will be described later. The third group, the smallest of all, consisted

of those who lived on their own, with the help of Aryan papers. They were in constant contact with the movement centers in one of the Red Cross offices, and they were the ones who carried out most of the rescue operations during this period. The fourth group was composed of those who were in the various children's homes. There was constant mobility between these groups, guided by the leadership of the Resistance and the movements. Comrades were frequently transferred from one rescue operation to another, and there was a steady increase in the number of those engaged in maintenance of the children's homes, or in activities connected with these homes as a result of the enormous growth of this activity, especially during the months of November and December.

CHAPTER 10

CHILDREN'S HOMES

One of the horrifyingly familiar phenomena from the ghettos of Eastern Europe was that of the abandoned, hungry children, dying of starvation This did not occur in Budapest, because of the short period of time involved, and because of the efforts of the Resistance. When the Soviet Army liberated Budapest in January 1945, there were about 30 children's homes there, with about 3000 to 4000 children, and some 1500 to 2000 adults. This extensive network was set up immediately after October 15.[1]

As early as September, Friedrich Born placed the offices of the International Red Cross at 4 Mérleg Street at the disposal of the Relief and Rescue Committee, and Komoly set up Department A (*A osztály*), the Children's Department there.[2] The Department received legal permission for its activities on the grounds that the Red Cross dealt with emigration of children irrespective of faith or origin. This served the purposes of the activists very well, since they required an official and recognized address at offices which enjoyed the formal protection of a recognized international body. Previously there had been practically no institutions for children. There had been one home for children of the refugees, set up in 1942 in Vác, and conducted by the Bretler couple and Dr. Osterweil. Some of the older children there went to Palestine at the beginning of 1944 with the legal Youth *Aliyah.* A few of the boys succeeded in escaping with a *tiyul* to Romania before August.[3]

Besides this home for refugee children, there were only the community orphan homes which had always existed in Budapest. These enjoyed the protection of the Swedish Red Cross, extended to them by Langlet before October, even though they seemed to be in no danger at the time. A group of about 30 orphans was included in the Kasztner transport. During the entire period of the deportations from the provincial towns there was no known instance where children were left behind, or were sent to Budapest by their parents. This phenomenon alone indicates how naively most Hungarian Jews reacted to the deportations, as well as how lacking they were in experience and in any sort of efficient organizational power at this time. At any rate, there can be no doubt that in all these cases the courageous family solidarity militated against any prospects of rescuing parts of families or even individual members.

The deportations which began toward the end of October were quite different from those which had been carried out in the provincial towns. All persons of working age had been ordered to report. Hungarian police, accompanied by SS or Arrow Cross men, raided the Yellow Star houses and took away all who had not reported, leaving behind the aged, pregnant women, the ill, and the children. Infants and children were thus left without care or supervision. It is difficult to ascertain who were the first children gathered up and how the first contact was established between them and the members of the Resistance. It would appear that those Halutzim who systematically went through the Yellow Star houses searching for their comrades and their families were the ones who picked up the abandoned children and brought them to Komoly's office on Mérleg Street.

Within a few days a rumor was circulating to the effect that the Red Cross was placing Jewish children under its patronage. People immediately came forward with youngsters. Some were relatives and acquaintances; others were neighbors and even gentile building superintendents who sought to save children who had been forsaken. In many cases the fathers had been sent off with the labor service units and had been killed, and now the mothers had suddenly been taken away. There were also many instances where mothers brought their own children, especially when the ghetto was set up.

Ottó Komoly's contacts, established earlier with Friedrich Born, and the assistance provided by hundreds of activists in the Halutz movements were chiefly responsible for the success of the undertaking.

Komoly and his staff, many of them young adults and some of them from the youth movements, were the center of all the activity. On November 7 Komoly, who for the most part dealt with political contacts, moved from his office on Mérleg Street to a new office at 52 Baross Street. The staff remaining in the old quarters concentrated on the new operation, dealing with equipment, food supplies, and manpower to take care of the children. Housing for the children was obtained in various ways. In return for Red Cross protection, some people offered the use of their villas, as well as apartments in larger buildings, where dozens of children were housed. The rapidity with which the unexpected problem was created, and its vast scope, imposed a heavy responsibility on the shoulders of those who looked after the logistic aspects. In most places they had to acquire such equipment as beds, sheets, blankets, clothing, and eating utensils. They also had to assure a steady and systematic supply of food, and in many cases special food for babies. The problem of assembling a staff to look after the children was relatively easy. Very often those who had found the children remained with them. There were also many members of the movements who had more experience with children and with education than with other aspects of Resistance activity. Many mothers who came to the homes with their children remained as members of the staff of attendants. Others, who sought shelter and refuge from the deportation also showed up at the children's homes. In some cases the number of attendants approached or even equaled the number of children.

One of the largest and most important of the children's homes was that located at 90 Dób Street.[4] Miklós Kertész, a Social Democrat member of the Hungarian House of Representatives, was prominently involved in this undertaking. He and his family were relatively much better off than most of the Jews in Budapest because of his relations with the leaders of his party and the trade unions. In most cases, Socialists extended help to their Jewish friends, and it must be noted that these were among the few relationships which stood the test even during this period.

Kertész was one of the first to meet with Wallenberg when the latter came to Hungary, and through him met Carl Ivan Danielsson, the Swedish Minister to Hungary, who at first hesitated to sign the first temporary passports. Kertész was also the one who prepared for Wallenberg one of the earliest lists which later led to the issuance of the protective passes distributed immediately after October 15. About a week after Szálasi

assumed power, Kertész suggested to Komoly that a children's home, under the protection of the International Red Cross, should be set up in a building which had previously been occupied by two trade unions whose activity had been banned. Komoly approved and at once began to modify the office building, adapting it for dwelling purposes. The work was done by Kertész himself, his son-in-law, Dr. László Antal, and members of the Resistance who had been sent from the central office on Mérleg Street. Within a few days the four-story house was completely altered. The members of the Resistance brought beds, mattresses, blankets, and other necessary equipment. Most of the items were purchased with funds provided by the Relief and Rescue Committee. This aspect of the work was handled for the most part by Hansi Brand, Shalom Offenbach and Zoltán Weiner, and on behalf of the Halutz Resistance, by Efra Agmon.[5]

Another who contributed greatly to the operation of this refuge was László Szamosi, a local young man who had previously not been associated with the Resistance, but bore Aryan papers. His name appeared on the list of those scheduled to go on the *aliyah* being arranged at Vadász Street. When his wife and two children could no longer stand the hardships involved in seeking a place to live, the entire family moved into the children's home directed by Kertész. Szamosi recalled his experience:

> We came to the children's home at 90 Dob Street at the end of October . . . . There were about 50 or 60 children there at the time . . . . The place afforded a relative degree of security to those inside, adults and children alike, but this was only within its walls. From the windows we could see men and women being rounded up on suspicion of being Jews . . . . The day after our arrival I went out, of course without the Yellow badge, and went to a friend who had a wholesale shop for household supplies. I bought everything I could get: dishes, pots, eating utensils, cleaning implements, kerosene, even anti-lice material. I went to our former home, where there was a plant for the manufacture of noodles. I bought 300 kilograms which my friend, owner of the place, "swiped" from an order intended for the army . . . . Thereafter there was a steady supply of food provided by Department A of the Red Cross, headed by Komoly.[6]

Councellors from the various movements also gathered in the home. Yaakov Hollander, a member of *Hashomer Hatzair,* told about education:

> The Jews there were a widely diversified group . . . . I slept in the library, between the bookshelves. The place was filled with Jews, a lot of them adults, and over a hundred children . . . . I took care of education. I divided the children into age groups; most of them were between seven and twelve, perhaps a bit older. Things were pretty well organized during the day. The children studied . . . . I tried hard to teach Hebrew in every class, and told them about *Eretz Yisrael.* There was a Polish chap who helped me. I know only that his name was Janek. He also organized the guard duty in the yard . . . . He got along very well with the Arrow Cross people, and they never came into the building.[7]

The children's home was indeed a concentration of Jews from every walk of life and with widely divergent outlooks on life. There were many Halutzim, like Hollander, who had deserted from the labor service and had come there under instructions from their movements. By December the number of souls approached a thousand, and the congestion was almost unbearable. Somehow it was possible to pack the children together, but the sanitary conditions, including the toilets, which had originally been intended for a small office building, were unable to meet the requirements of such a large concentration of people. The adults were drawn to the place because of the security afforded by the Red Cross protection, as indicated on the sign outside.[8]

Security was a relative matter. Arrow Cross men tried to get into the building more than once, since even the patronage of the Red Cross could not conceal the fact that there were Jews there, and it is inconceivable that only the alertness of a Janek could prevent such entry. The disturbance was caused not only by the desire of the Arrow Cross people to catch a few more Jews, which was their avowed aim, but also by the reports that there was treasure inside, and especially food. The lack of food supplies was quite critical throughout the capital. The shortage had become acute toward the end of the summer, and became worse as large areas of Hungary were overrun by the Soviet Army. Battles were ranging not far from the city. The situation was made even worse by the

general administrative confusion, the rampant corruption, the spreading black market, and the complete inability of the government to exercise control. Under these circumstances, even the defense provided by the Red Cross was dependent on the ability of the people on the spot to invoke the legal power of the protection. In every case the determining factors were the self-assurance, the steadfastness, and the daring of those responsible for the home.

Many of the Arrow Cross gangs were composed of young people, 16 or 17 years of age. It was possible to obtain a psychological advantage over them by addressing them in the second-person familiar, something which is not customary in Hungary—even insulting if used toward persons other than immediate family or close friends. Sometimes a dauntless and unflinching appearance and an assertive spirit of superiority were sufficient to cow the youth.

It should be kept in mind that in most cases the Arrow Cross men were lacking in experience and education. Their major strength was in their firearms. They could not understand the claim that the building was subject to "extraterritorial" rights, but the term impressed them. Another argument was that if they harmed the International Red Cross they would be endangering the Hungarian soldiers held captive by the enemy. This accusation brought them up against a responsibility they did not know how to face. Another good defense which worked quite well was the threat that someone would immediately telephone the Foreign Ministry. If this was linked to the name of Gábor Kemény, the Foreign Minister and one of the Arrow Cross leaders, the impression was created that those in the house enjoyed his personal protection. Most of those who tried to enter the building were from the ignorant masses, and they were so impressed with the names and titles used that it was not necessary to carry out the threat.

Defense of the houses against Arrow Cross rampages rested on three elements. First and foremost was the presence of mind and the ability of the people in the house to respond to crisis. Second was the central office, headed by Komoly, who was in almost daily personal touch with all the homes, as well as telephone contact practically to the end. This daily concern, with the help of the neutral legations, which interceded with the Hungarian authorities and at times even with the German diplomatic mission, more than once prevented transfer of the children's homes

to the ghetto or averted attacks by the Arrow Cross. If not for Komoly's activities, the entire program would certainly have disintegrated. The third defensive element, and during the final weeks the only one which was effective, was the mounting of a physical guard. The Halutzim, wearing uniforms of the Arrow Cross, or military or paramilitary units, were the guards, sometimes reinforced and assisted by non-Jews from the Hungarian resistance movements. Thanks to all this, there were only a few scattered cases in which the Arrow Cross men succeeded in penetrating into children's homes. In most homes the children came through the days of terror without harm. This was no mean achievement, considering the rioting and the anarchy which prevailed, especially during the last month before liberation.

The general conditions and the environment were the same for all the homes. They all enjoyed the same protection and the same central direction, but each home had its own story. Yitshak Junger, a religious Jew and active Zionist, told of one of the homes in his testimony. On the very day that the government was seized he, like many others, decided not to return to the labor service. Instead he reported to Komoly at the International Red Cross center on Mérleg Street. At first Junger ran various errands for the center, armed with Aryan papers, a Red Cross armband, and a document certifying that he was an employee of the international organization. He wore a Red Cross armband. He helped distribute food, falsified papers and circulated them, and in general engaged in the various activities which were carried out by dozens of young people in the Resistance.

One of the offices of the Swedish legation and of Department A was at 2 Perczel Mór Street. Junger was appointed director of a children's home which was located in another part of the same building. He testified:

> The apartment of Géza Lakatos, a former Hungarian Prime Minister, was the place designated for the children's home. One day the wife of the former Premier appeared at the office on Mérleg Street and offered part of her nine-room residence for this purpose . . . .The offer was accepted with alacrity and joy. The place was suitable for a children's home from every point of view. The location was also excellent, since it was opposite the former American legation, in Szabadság Square, now occupied by the Consul, Charles Lutz. . . .

> There were no beds, but everyone slept on blankets or sheets spread out on the floor. The staff was composed for the most part of men who had deserted from the labor service, and mothers of some of the children. There was also a gentile woman who was of great help, particularly because she was the only one who could leave the house and present genuine Aryan papers.[9]

Most of the children there came through the Mérleg Street office. Among them were 71 babies, brought by Gábor Sztehló, a Lutheran minister who headed a church organization known as the Good Shepherd Mission (Jó Pásztor Misszió), which had been established in 1942 to assist converts to Christianity. People used to bring him abandoned Jewish children, and in some cases children who had been rescued by Hungarian policemen from amidst the mass murders on the banks of the Danube.[10]

Sztehló would transfer these children, including babies, to the Resistance members at Mérleg Street, and the latter would divide them up among the various homes in accordance with age and possibility of integration. An exact daily register was kept at Junger's home, and the count shows that at the end of the period there were 314 children and 71 infants in General Lakatos's residence. The number of adults fluctuated, depending on people's opportunities to leave when they had to establish contact with the outside, and on the possibilities of their return. Throughout, the home received its food supplies from the center, through Peretz Révész, but this did not always relieve those in charge of the need to supplement these supplies.

On the record this was a shelter for children of Hungarian soldiers, under the auspices of the Red Cross, and under the supervision of the authorities, mostly the Arrow Cross officials of the Fifth District. The director of the home had to report every other day at party headquarters and give an up-to-date account of the number of children. He knew very well that they were apt to come from time to time to check the accuracy of his figures. The Arrow Cross supervision over this home was closer and more scrupulous than over any of the other institutions. Nevertheless, by some miracle the true identity of the children was never revealed, nor was the nature of the whole set-up, which included young men who had deserted from the labor service, ever discovered. The connections were so close that at one stage Junger ventured to request from

the Arrow Cross blankets and other equipment for "the children of the soldiers fighting at the front." He received them.

The apartment in which this shelter was housed was in a large residential building in a respectable quarter. One of the other tenants was the wife of a German officer. One day she complained that the children were disturbing her rest, and an SS unit came to investigate what was going on. Nothing happened as a result of this investigation because the Germans honored the supervision of the Hungarian police and the party. The only result was that an SS sergeant returned the following day. He declared that the war was already lost, and he asked that they hide him. This was a request that could not be refused. The SS man arrived with a valid one-day pass, and the Resistance systematically "extended" it. He remained in the home until liberation and carried out many errands, especially during the last month when every departure from the building involved risk. In one instance he even provided a hand grenade which was used to break into a pharmacy where Junger obtained medicines and baby food.

Most of the children's homes were established during November, and were manned by comrades who had been transferred from Vadász Street, or had up to then been able to get along on their own with Aryan documents. The home on Budakeszi Avanue was set up in that way. It was located in a most elegant quarter, at the foot of the Buda hills, amidst lovely villas. The area was remote from any Jewish homes, and was therefore less dangerous. Two children's homes had already been established there. Yeshayahu (Sajó) Rosenblum described how this home was created:

> I was masquerading under the identity of one Péter Kállai, with papers that showed I was a wounded lieutenant. My face was covered with all sorts of bandages because I was afraid my Jewish features would give me away. I begged Dajnus [Adoniyahu Billitzer] to give me something to do, and he replied: "An aristocrat has just given us a real palace, on Budakeszi Avenue. Take this sign with the symbol of the Red Cross and hang it there. We'll prepare papers certifying that the building is under Red Cross auspices. Here are the keys; we'll open a children's home there." We went there with a few comrades that very night. At about three o'clock in the morning two military vehicles suddenly stopped in front of the building. We didn't know what had happened, and

> quaked with fear. Suddenly we heard someone call out, "Sajó! Where are you?" It was Kepes in a KISKA [see Chapter 13] uniform. He had brought something like 80 to 100 children. I was scared of what would happen to us. Nothing had been prepared, and at the end of November we could die of starvation and freeze from the cold. To our good fortune two more trucks came the next day, bearing food, blankets, more children, and also adults who could help take care of them. At the end, we had close to 300 souls.[11]

The story of Kepes (Eliezer Kadmon) is not directly related to the subject of the children's homes, but a few words of explanation here will shed further light on Sajó's testimony. Among those previously categorized as independent activists were many who had all sorts of connections with the Arrow Cross or with various paramilitary bodies like the KISKA. From a practical point of view such connections usually took the form only of the wearing of the uniform and the possession of the appropriate documents. On some occasions it did involve actual affiliation. These devices made possible freedom of movement, for they provided the only explanation as to why able-bodied young men were not in the army. Cover like this had many other advantages as well, such as the ability to use official vehicles, and at times it even provided ready access to government food warehouses. Of course it was necessary to make use of this legal subterfuge only at the right time and the right place, and with all the flexibility that the ever-changing conditions dictated. Additional details on this subject will be found in the next chapter.

In his testimony Kepes Eliezer Kadmon provided supplementary information on the group of children.

> The brick factory in Óbuda was one of the concentration points where people were gathered, and from there sent on foot in the direction of the Austrian border. The place was guarded by the Arrow Cross rather than by the gendarmerie . . . . I attempted to get in using military cover, but they wouldn't let me, maintaining that only they represented the government. I returned the next day, without a uniform, and in a car of the International Red Cross, Department A. This time they let me in without any difficulty, I don't know why. Perhaps it was because we said we came

> to make things easier for them, and we would take the children who in any event would not be able to stand the rigors of the road. I recall that we had enormous problems seeking to convince the children to come with us.[12]

All this was most unusual; in most cases children were not taken to these concentration points but left by themselves in the Yellow-Star houses.

The establishment of the children's homes occupied an important place in the Zionist philosphy of the Resistance activities. It was not a matter of chance that such concentrated efforts were made to effect the rescues. Children, more than any other population group, constituted the basis for the national future, just as they were the basis for the Zionist movement in general and all the movements which constituted the Resistance in particular. This quality, which was also reflected in the organizational structure, was summarized by Moshe Alpan in his later testimony:

> This I recall from memory. We always knew that we had to organize: firstly, to protect the children, for we considered them a national asset, and secondly, to preserve a base for the movement after the liberation. We thought we could do this as a joint action. We were also very fearful of the starvation which began to spread in the Yellow-Star houses and later in the ghetto. We told all our comrades that we were gathering the children in children's homes, and everyone who could, should bring children . . . . I recall that this element was always present, that we wanted to save the young generation for the movement. This instinct of youth movement members was extremely important because it saved many people. Later, when about 120,000 Jews were left in the Budapest ghetto, our principal fear was that the Nazis would destroy the ghetto as a final act of vengeance. If anyone was in danger, then the whole ghetto was imperilled . . . and if anything should indeed happen to the ghetto, the children must be the first to be rescued.[13]

This dual consideration, rescue of children and broadening of the base of the movement, may be regarded as an instinctive reaction growing out of the cumulative experience. It would be difficult to distinguish between the two components.

Another factor which played a role in the broad movement to set up children's homes was the presence of many active members of the movements, young women, and also young men who had fled from the labor service, for whom these homes were a refuge.

A sort of positive competition to establish children's homes developed among the movements during October and November. This new initiative led to the creation of more shelters and in addition assured the survival of the movements after the libeation.

The Resistance and the youth movements had good control over their people, and could guarantee that the staff members would remain at their posts, thus ensuring the smooth functioning of the homes. In those cases where a majority of the staff were not movement members, there was considerably less reliability. A few instances are known where the children's homes were abandoned a few days before the arrival of the Red Army, or where the children were left without supervision.[14] Such instances, few in number to be sure, resulted from the rush and from organizational difficulties during such a stormy period.

There was an additional significance to the responsibility assumed by the movement, in that while concerning itself with the staff of counsellors it also saw to the organization of some sort of educational framework. At first sight it seems odd and not altogether logical that at a time when people were being killed in the streets in broad daylight, when thousands of people were daily being dispatched on a death march, when government offices were being evacuated from the city and factories were being dismantled and moved westward, the leaders of the Halutz Resistance were involved in the establishment of a Zionist educational program for children whose parents were missing, and there was no information indeed as to whether they were still alive. In many cases even the identity of the children themselves was unknown.

CHAPTER 11

FOOD SUPPLY AND FALSE PROTECTIVE PASSES

The Resistance never expected that it would have to become involved in the supply of food for the children's homes, and later for the protected houses and for the ghetto. The entire program grew out of a need. As the number of homes continued to grow at an ever-increasing pace, it became clear that there was a need to organize an ongoing supply of food to maintain a population of over 5000.

The supply of food to such a variegated population would have been a complicated organizational and administrative problem even during time of peace, but it was all the more difficult when it dealt with a network of about 30 sites in a city under aerial bombardment, besieged from without, and sinking into anarchy within. Financing was not the only problem, since even money could not always purchase food. Even when the supplies had been acquired, there were problems of transportation and distribution, since all transport facilities had been mobilized for the war effort. Even when this problem had been overcome, there was no assurance that a shipment would indeed reach its destination, for Arrow Cross gangs were routinely operating like highwaymen, and the police were unable to provide even minimal protection.

It was hardly surprising, therefore, that when the need arose there was no agency ready and able to provide the service required. At first the problem was met logically, or upon the initiative of members of the youth

movements who were able to get around. The central organization was drawn into the work several days later, and only gradually succeeded in overcoming objective difficulties. What was in effect a form of commissariat was directed by Hansi Brand, Zoli Weiner, and Efra Agmon. The transport arrangments were, for the beginning of November, managed by Rudolf Weisz, who was already known in the Resistance as Uncle Rudi (*Rudi bácsi*). He was called upon by Komoly to fill this job after an interval of thorough disorganization at the beginning.[1]

During the initial period there was no great problem in obtaining the funds required. The Rescue Committee had access to resources both from abroad and from the local community and its people. No precise figures are available, but it is known that large sums reached Budapest from Istanbul and Geneva in the summer and fall of 1944. The money came through various channels, including the Swiss diplomatic mission, the representatives of the International Red Cross, and through couriers who continued to get to Budapest from Istanbul until the end of August.[2] The money was held by the members of the Committee, Hansi Brand and Shalom Offenbach, who was the treasurer, as well as by members of the Jewish Council. Most of it was in foreign currency or in gold.

Money alone did not solve all problems. Foodstuffs were under government control and were not sold on the open market. Under the Szálasi government this control was ostensibly absolute and it applied to all consumer goods, but in practice it was inefficient and corrupt. Naturally, this led to the creation of a black market. Such conditions made it easier for the Resistance people to make illegal deals, but it is doubtful they would have been able to overcome all the difficulties without the aid of reliable professionals, who had considerable experience and contacts in the trade. Jews who were in the business, some of the most important food wholesalers in the country, were mobilized for that purpose.

These Jews, Uncle Somló chief among them, knew how and where to get almost anything. They operated under the protection of the Red Cross, which gave them a certain immunity, albeit very limited because of the conditions. These respectable people, who had never been involved in such activities before, now found themselves engaged in a dangerous rescue operation of an underground character, but under the direction of Efra Agmon and Uncle Somló, they did all that was expected of them with devotion and self-sacrifice.

The final link in the supply chain was transportation. As noted, Weisz had taken over this aspect of the work in Department A of the International Red Cross. He had owned a transport company whose equipment consisted of horse-drawn wagons. After the German occupation he had transferred the company to a Christian, as required by law. At the urging of Komoly, he got in touch with the Christian manager, in whom he had confidence, and the two drew up a valid agreement. The firm placed four wagons, together with laborers and a work foreman, at the disposal of Department A. All expenses would be covered, and protection of the Red Cross would be extended to all engaged in the transportation.

Uncle Somló's warehouses were located in various places in the city and in the nearby suburbs. From time to time they would fill up with food received directly from the producers, or from rail shipments intended for other destinations. They contained enormous quantities of food, particularly that which could stand prolonged storage, such as various types of dry beans, flour, noodles, preserves, hard cheeses, etc. Uncle Rudi kept the detailed daily records of every shipment, including exact quantities, the source, and the destination. These lists were lost after the war, and only one chance listing has remained, covering the period between November 28 and December 19, 1944, which was after the establishment of the ghetto. During that time alone about 140 tons of food were sent to the central ghetto, which gives some inkling of the capacity of the warehouses.[3]

After the financing had been procured, everything that followed—the purchase of supplies, their storage, and transportation—were of avail only if the Resistance could guarantee that the material would indeed reach its intended destination. This was an almost impossible task under conditions then rampant in the streets of the capital. More than once merchandise was seized by Arrow Cross members who were themselves in need of food. In many other cases parts of the shipment had to be surrendered to the Arrow Cross, in order to save the remainder. The Resistance managed to keep thousands of people alive only by resorting to all sorts of wiles and ruses. The protection of the Red Cross was not always effective. In some cases the shipments were escorted by comrades from the Resistance dressed in uniforms of the army or of the Arrow Cross, and bearing false transmittal documents to the effect that the food was intended for the army, for the party, or for military hospitals. Toward the

end of December, when Budapest was almost completely surrounded, a number of members of the Arrow Cross, and even of the SS, were willing to cooperate and to provide protection for the food and the warehouses, in return for protective letters of the Red Cross or of one of the legations. In this way they hoped to save their own skins when the friends of the Resistance came to power. Like Berecky and others they were convinced that with the arrival of the Russians, the Jews would take over.

The 2000 residents of the Glass House were in need of food no less than the children's homes. Jews who lived in Budapest were able to return to their own homes after receiving their precious certificates, but those who had deserted from the labor service in ever increasing numbers had nowhere to go, and they insisted on their rights not to go outdoors. It was impossible to evict them from the building, at least no one tried to do so by force. In this way the Representation of Foreign Interests in the Swiss legation took more and more wards under its protective wing.

At the beginning of November the new government began to suspect that the number of protective passes in circulation was far in excess of the number which was permitted to each legation, and requested that those who held such passes be segregated into special buildings.[4] The government edict calling for the establishment of such protected houses (*védett házak*) was issued on November 12. It was preceded by a meeting between the Foreign Minister and the representatives of the various neutral legations who promised the Minister that they would see to the emigration of the protected Jews "soon." The number of protective passes authorized by the authorities at this time was as follows: Switzerland, 7800; Sweden, 4500; the Vatican, 2500; Portugal, 700; Spain, 100. The houses were set up according to these proportions, and the Jews were expected to move into them by Novmber 15. Those in charge at Vadász Street attempted to divert some of their Jews to these houses, but it was not easy to convince the people to move.

All the protected houses were and continued to be Yellow-Star houses. They were concentrated in the Fifth District, which was relatively close to the Swis legation and to Vadász Street, but quite far from the Seventh District where the ghetto was later set up. Despite the terms "protected," these houses, too, were subject to the violence of the Arrow Cross, and many Jews were taken out of them for deportation and murder. Deportation of the protected Jews later provided the neutral representatives with

the pretext to intervene in the death march for the purpose of rescuing "their" Jews. The courageous efforts of Raoul Wallenberg in defense of the "Swedish houses" has been widely described, sometimes even exaggerated. Much less is known of the Vatican's efforts, conducted by a young priest named Tibor Baránszki. His work was carried out with devotion and with no small degree of success, though on a smaller scale.[5] The protected houses were from the beginning flooded with thousands of Jews in addition to the previous residents, who did not possess protective passes. In addition many thousands of Jews holding false papers also came, with the result that the congestion was dreadful. Most of the residents in the "international ghetto"—as the protective houses were referred to—were toward the end transferred to the general ghetto.

The ideological conflicts in the Glass House between the young Resistance members and the older generation continued in intensity, though at times all distinctions were blurred between Zionists and non-Zionists, and between young and old. Differences of opinion flared up over the character of the House, over the scope of the rescue attempts, and over the distribution of the protective passes. Despite this, it was necessary somehow to organize the activity, and most important, the daily life within the four walls.

Alexander (Sanyi) Grossman, more than anyone else, at this time placed the stamp of his personality on the internal organization and on the program of activities at Vadász Street.[6] Until October 16 his influence was not particularly felt, but from that date on he became the central personality in the offices of the Foreign Representation, and his words were heeded. He was a forceful person, who possessed outstanding administrative ability and an untiring capacity for work. He got along with very little sleep, and was to be found everywhere, listening, making decisions, and issuing instructions. His vigor and his devotion quickly propelled him to the fore, and gradually even the adults became accustomed to doing his bidding. He was somewhat older than most of the members of the youth movements, and this made it easier for him to deal with the older generation, who used to dismiss the 20-year-old youngers as "squirts."

When the building on Vadász Street became a refuge for large numbers of people, no one knew how to feed so many residents, and especially the ones who had no external sources to draw upon for their needs. Most of the people came without any of the requisites for a lengthy stay, with

the result that there were many technical problems which demanded immediate, radical solutions. The problems began in the very first days when a number of men from the labor service units, waiting for their *Schutzpässe,* refused to leave until the papers were ready. They remained for two or three days without food, since there were no organized feeding facilities in the building.

At first Grossman attempted to lump together all food which came privately for some of the people, and to distribute it equally. This created tension, and it was clear from the outset that it was a temporary, emergency solution only. Large quantities of food had to be obtained as quickly as possible. Funds were still available, and there were people with contacts in the wholesale food field. As in the Red Cross operation, here too there was an effective coordination between the Resistance youth and the older generation. Later, when it became difficult to obtain all the money required to feed large numbers of people, Grossman proposed to a large margarine manufacturer that the company sell them any quantity of merchandise, at the official price, to be paid in dollars after the war. The offer was made in the name of the Swiss legation, and was accepted without difficulty. In the first place, the local businessmen trusted the Swiss diplomatic mission, and accepted the pledge that payment would indeed be made. Many were able to guess, without difficulty, that the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee was behind the offer, and it was inded that organization which in due time paid the bill. In the second place, the manufacturers realized that the chances of their holding on to their inventory were in any event poor. Many warehouses were destroyed or burned down in the bombardments, and those which were unaffected were pillaged by the Arrow Cross. Transfer of the merchandise to the Jews in the Swiss legation was therefore a solution convenient to both sides. After the first successful deal of this nature, it was much easier to extend the system to other industries as well, all on a purely commercial basis.

It must be observed that the neutral missions still commanded considerable prestige. They were almost the only elements which enjoyed general confidence in the Hungarian capital at that time. Mention of the name of one of the missions, or of the Red Cross, was enough to open almost all doors. This fact was exploited on other levels as well, like in the rental of buildings. As has been noted, apartments, villas and houses could be used for children's homes, which thereupon qualified for Red Cross protection.

After October 15 it was possible without difficulty to obtain houses from private individuals or from commercial companies, not necessarily out of political sympathy, but simply because the property owners were making desperate endeavors to save what they could from the ravages of the Arrow Cross rabble. For this reason, at the beginning of November, a third office of the Representation of Foreign Interests of the Swiss legation was opened at 17 Wekerle Sándor Street.

Most of the Resistance workers and some of the original staff at the Glass House were then transferred to the new offices, where the physical conditions were much better, and the major work of the Resistance became centered there. Two activities which had their roots on Vadász Street were now prominently associated with the new place, where they gained a totally unexpected dimension: concentration of enormous food supplies, and distribution of false protective passes on an unprecedented scale.

The largest inventory of food supplies anywhere in Budapest at the time was to be found in the storehouses at Wekerle Street and elsewhere in the city. The activists combined the food storage maintained under the auspices of the Swiss legation with the storerooms of the Red Cross which were, in effect, those of the Resistance operating under the international symbol. Since financial resources had almost dried up, most of this food and some additional equipment was obtained by guarantee of payment after liberation.

These depots were the source of food and equipment not only for thousands of people in the children's homes and in the legation buildings, but also for the Jews in the protected houses, in the general ghetto, and even for the Hungarian Resistance.[7] This vast undertaking may be seen in better perspective when it is realized that the entire city was on the verge of starvation. At the beginning of December, without any advance warning and with extreme brutality, the Arrow Cross government moved about 70,000 people into the ghetto. The authorities had no way of providing food for these people who were for the most part aged, sick, or children. The Jewish leadership, despite its best intentions, had only limited means for meeting the problem. The legation warehouses had not been planned for such a large-scale need, but the supplies they did have on hand were for the most part of high nutritional content, hence they were of inestimable value.

The organized feeding from the central control, that is, the joint supplies of the Swiss legation and the Red Cross, became even more important from the beginning of November and until the end of January, during the critical period when the central regime was beginning to crumble, and major government officials, as well as high ranking party leaders, were fleeing the city westward.

The feeding operation, more than any other activity, provided grounds for fruitful cooperation between the young Halutzim and the other Jews. This collaboration made possible efficient organization which was able to overcome most obstacles and assure a more or less steady food supply down to the very last day of the Nazi regime, and even into the first period following liberation.

Alongside this successful food program, the Resistance continued its production of false documents and rubber stamps. The Swiss *Schutzpass,* it will be recalled, certified that its holder was registered in a collective passport for purposes of immigration to Palestine. The Hungarian government did demand that these Jews leave, and from time to time fixed a "final date" for the emigration, threatening that after that date the protection would be terminated. The last date set was December 22.

Preparing the protective passes involved two stages. First of all, the applicant had to gain admission to the building, which was constantly being stormed by thousands. Next, he would appear before one of the clerks in the "Swiss legation" and impart all personal information about himself and close members of his family, as required for filling out the forms. The *Schutzpass* would then be typed. Dozens of typists, at times as many as sixty or more, were engaged in this.

The second stage was the stamping of the completed form. As noted earlier, the Consul, Charles Lutz, was responsible for the Representation of Foreign Interests at the Swiss legation. His office was at the former American legation in Szabadság Square, where the necessary rubber stamp was kept. The daily procedure was for one of the clerks, usually accompanied by Arthur Weiss or Mihály Salamon, to take all the forms requiring authentication from Vadász Street to Lutz's office. Under the best of circumstances, the stamped forms were returned the following day, but the process frequently took another day or two.

The official quota had been reached in full even before October, but immediately after October 15, the original staff at Vadász Street began to issue protective passes in excess of the number approved by the Hungarian government. The system was simple. After distributing the first 7800 passes, they produced another 7800 and numbered them again from one to 7800, repeating the process again and again. Even this procedure was regarded by the Resistance as too slow and too limited.

In fact, protective passes over and above the legal quota had been distributed from the moment the crowds began to overrun the building at Vadász Street. Eliyahu Gellért (Gal-Or), one of the veteran clerks there, referred to this issuance of protective passes as being "within a controlled framework."[8] As a matter of fact, this was the onset of the breaching of the framework. The staff at the legation could no longer keep up with the demand, and additional help was taken on.

Issuance of protective passes to men in the labor service was handled by a special section headed at first by Grossman and later by Dr. Alexander (Sándor) Nathan.[9] Because of the special problems involved, this section was always headed by a member of the Resistance. When one or two men came to apply for documents for 200 or 300 people, it became obvious that the usual bureaucratic procedures could not be followed. The delay caused by dispatch of the forms to the consulate were regarded by the Resistance people as unbearable bureaucracy. They also maintained that protective passes whould be issued immediately to all who applied and without restriction. Each day's delay could be the equivalent of a death sentence for those who had to report to concentration points for deportation to Germany, or for those who were to be sent west with the labor service units. Writing on stationery of the legation, Grossman ordered unlimited quantities of the precious forms, in perfectly "legal" manner.

Two members of *Maccabi Hatzair* worked as Aryan laborers in a printing shop, and did most of the work themselves. Even more effective, however, was that most of the printers, who constituted an elite in Hungary's working class, had for a long time been organized in Social Democratic labor unions, and it was therefore relatively easy to obtain their cooperation. All the movements very soon had their own reserve supply of forms which could be handed out.[9]

The rubber stamp problem was solved in the same way. In the name of the legation, orders for stamps were placed with skilled artisans. Some of

the stamps were in German and some in French, in accordance with Swiss tradition. At this stage a very grave mishap occurred. The office at Wekerle Street, which was one of the major sources of the documents, used a stamp in which the letter "i" was missing from the word "Suisse." It is not clear how this accident happened, but before it was discovered, some hundreds and perhaps thousands of the defective protective passes were distributed.[10] The error was found only after holders of these passes had been apprehended and many had been deported. The exact number is not known, but there is no doubt that this unfortunate mistake resulted in the loss of human life.

The new office at Wekerle Street began to give out protective passes at the beginning of November. The intention was to ease the procedures for men in the labor service and for both men and women who were in danger of immediate deportation. Many members of the labor service deserted their units at this time, taking advantage of the command's inability to exercise control. The moment one of the men found that he knew someone in the legation, or heard of the possibility of obtaining the protection papers—and who had not heard about it?—arrangements were made for all members of the unit to get the papers. Most of the *Schutzpässe* were given to entire units, whenever one of the men, or a Hungarian staff member, succeeded in reaching the office. The documents did not always arrive on time, and they did not always help, but thousands of men were saved from deportation. In addition to the documents given out at the office of the legation, thousands more were distributed from the Red Cross offices on Baross Street and on Perczel Mór Street.

Members of the Resistance operated in the various offices without any clear connection with the body which had extended its formal patronage. The signs outside the buildings were sufficient to provide the activists with a relative degree of security, however, enabling them to maintain contact with the other members of the Resistance and to extend help to those in need, either from their own movement, or from the general Jewish population. The widening and the diversification of the rescue activities after October 1944 tended to weaken many elements which formed the basis of movement life. Contacts based on close friendship, and on a sense of deep personal solidarity, which are so vital in a Resistance framework, did remain however. Each movement maintained its day-to-day contacts with its own members and staked out its claim to a corner in one of the official

offices where the movement members could turn in time of need, and from which the activities were directed.

With the expansion of the Red Cross activities, part of the leadership of the movements moved to the new offices. *Maccabi Hatzair* personnel settled down for the most part in the offices at Perczel Mór Street. *Hashomer Hatzair* and *Dror-Habonim* found their place at Baross Street. The latter place caused many problems because of the wide variety of functions carried on there. First and foremost, this was a recognized office of the Red Cross, but it also served as a communications center for members of the movements who went about in the uniforms of the various Fascist units. The place was also the contact point for the document laboratory. Furthermore, it was used as an "office" by Joska Meyer (Megyeri), who maintained contact with the local Communist underground. Contact with the bunkers of the *Dror* movement was also centered here. As if this were not enough, representatives of other movements who required papers came here, not to speak of hundreds of miscellaneous people who had heard that this was where "good" documents could be obtained. In the meantime, Komoly again moved his office, this time to 19 Munkácsi Mihály Street.[11]

The members of *Hanoar Hatzioni* found their place in another Red Cross office, a genuine one, on József Avenue, where a number of Jews worked under the personal protection of Born. Relations between them and the Resistance people, to be charitable, were not the best. Billitzer (Dajnus) and his sister, Braha, managed the movement's office. They also had a storehouse there in which they kept food and equipment for the bunkers of *Hanoar Hatzioni,* as well as a center for distribution of documents, most of which were received from the central laboratory through Baross Street, although there were other sources as well. For example, one of the activists in the movement, David (Coca) Grünwald, found a printing press on Eötvös Street, where the workmen agreed to print identification and birth certificates. An additional source for rubber stamps was found at a workshop on Károly Avenue run by a man named Kovács. Both the printer and the stamp maker were connected with the Communist underground, and this constituted still another tie between the two organizations for the exchange of documents and intelligence. The office on József Avenue remained open until the beginning of December. After the arrests were made at Baross Street it was closed and most of its staff went to the children's home at 35 Benczur Street.[12]

It is not possible to ascertain today with any degree of certainty how many Swiss protective passes were circulated by the Resistance. The number apparently ranged between 100,000 and 125,000.[13] It is even more difficult to estimate how many Jews owe their lives to these passes. For the Resistance this was a far-reaching enterprise directed toward the entire Jewish population. The members of the Resistance themselves, and this is a well-based generalization, never used these documents. They remained inside the legation building at Vadász Street, and on the occasions when they had to go out they used only Aryan papers. Others remained in the children's homes or in the bunkers, or used Aryan documents without ever wearing the Yellow badge.

It appears that the mass circulation given to the protective passes gradually reduced their value and their dependability in the eyes of the Hungarians. Against the background of the conditions then rampant in Budapest, it is impossible to verify these matters with any degree of accuracy. Hundreds of cases are known in which Arrow Cross members tore up genuine and authentic protective passes. Officially, all bearers of these passes were supposed to be exempt from deportation, and were not compelled to enter the ghetto, but these privileges were always dependent on the good will of people who, because the law was on their side, or because of the rifle slung over their shoulders, could decide who would live and who would die. When the protected houses were set up, the privileged residents were subject to the harrassment of the Fascists no less than the others. Still, it is difficult to ascertain with any certainty if the houses under Swiss patronage suffered any more than the others.

Toward the end of November and the beginning of December, the number of residents in the building at Vadász Street rose to over 3000. The situation there became unbearable, even after they had given up the pretense that this was only a set of offices. There was no longer any room to work and to prepare the documents, and not even enough room to stretch out on the floor in the corridors or even on the steps. Attempts to transfer some of the people to the protected houses were in many cases of no avail.

Management of the building passed more and more into the hands of the Resistance, and in addition to Grossman, a prominent part was taken by Simha Hunwald and Sándor Nathan. It was apparently Hunwald's idea to seek to obtain the office building next door at Vadász Street, 31, which housed the Hungarian Football Assocation (MLSz). The deal was

consummated, probably by Arthur Weiss. The soccer organization, which had in the past numbered many Jews among its directors, was delighted to place the building at the disposal of the legation, as many others had done before. This building, too, would now bear the sign of the Representation of Foreign Interests, like its neighbor on Vadász Street, 29.

The fact that Jews were to be found in the Glass House had long been an open secret to the Arrow Cross, and this was cause for considerable concern. Seeking to preserve the immunity of the second building, and to disguise the fact that people lived there, it was decided to enter it only through the basement. Close to a thousand people moved into the new building. Dr. Nathan was appointed director. However, if it was intended to relive the congestion in the original building, the new one filled that function for only a few days.

The possibility of armed resistance, though it never materialized, was always very real. Most of the youth movement personnel were concentrated in the new building, and they began preparations for combat in the event the house was attacked by the Arrow Cross. Weapons were smuggled in, and the people there began to train.

As a result of the pressing needs and the new challenges which were created following the Arrow Cross rise to power, many important changes took place both in the activities and in the organizational structure of the Halutz Resistance. There was also an increase in relations with legitimate and recognized bodies such as the Swiss legation and the International Red Cross, whose assistance made possible the establishment of the children's homes. Members of the Resistance were to be found in the other bodies as well, like the Swedish Red Cross and the Spanish consulate, in which László Szamosi played a very important role in permanent contact with Komoly.[14]

During that period the Resistance could be likened to an ellipse whose two focal points were at the Swiss legation and the International Red Cross. All its activities away from these two points were connected, from varying distances, to the two foci.

CHAPTER 12

THE BUNKERS

The idea of bunkers reached Hungary with refugees from Poland as early as 1942. These refugees favored bunkers as a means of rescuing lives and as a base for armed resistance, as they were indeed used in the ghettos of Poland. The idea had come up in Hungary in various forms during the months when the Resistance was gradually crystallizing its own form and programs. After the German occupation it became an instinctive reaction in some of the youth movements, but the idea was discarded when emphasis was placed on the *tiyul* and when the Kasztner transport left for Bergen-Belsen. Though it was not forgotten entirely, the idea was pushed aside in favor of solutions which were considered more effective in meeting the needs of the hour.

A fresh stimulus for preparation of bunkers was felt around the beginning of September, when the *tiyul* was discontinued. The bunkers, more than any other operation at this time, were purely internal movement activities. This was because of the differences of opinion regarding the need for them and because by their very nature they called for prolonged periods of occupation and severance of relations with the outside, conditions which were feasible only within the framework of a movement. *Dror-Habonim* devoted greater efort to preparation of bunkers than any of the others. Zvi and Neshka Goldfarb directed the project. A booklet by Neshka Goldfarb, published by *Dror-Habonim* in Hungary in 1946, told of their experience:

When we could no longer continue with the *tiyul* we began to create bunkers, following the Polish experience. Our movement was the only one which did so. Others, *Hashomer Hatzair,* for example, sent a number of their comrades to us because they had no bunkers. Our first bunker was in Gyálliget, a place we obtained through the contacts of Teicholtz, one of our members from Poland. We began to build it in the middle of the summer. Its capacity was limited, eight people at most. After October 15 we sent Fritz Klaus, Moshe Weisz and Friedman there. They were given two pistols and bullets. Arrangements for clothing, laundry and food were made with the landlord, for which we paid him. From a security point of view, this was our best bunker. The owner of the place was a Jew who assumed the identity of an Aryan captain. He was a veteran Communist, much respected in the village. Our second bunker was at Hungária Avenue, with a man named Szücs, who owned a large junkyard. There were 22 people in this bunker. Comrades who could not pass as Aryans because of their appearance, mostly girls, were sent here. The third bunker was at Hűvösvölgy. These bunkers were all well equipped. Every evening the owner would bring water and foodstuffs for an entire day. We kept all the possessions of the movement there because we considered the place secure. This bunker brought the members very close together, and they carried on extensive cultural activities. . . . Later we had another bunker on Hungária Avenue and another two in Érd. All the bunkers were administered from the office at 52 Baross Street. The office of the International Red Cross, run by Ottó Komoly, was on the second floor of that building, and our offices were downstairs. Members of *Hashomer,* directed by Rafi, worked in one room, and we occupied the second. This was actually the secretariat at the time. We also had storage space for clothing and for food. We kept weapons here and carried on commercial transactions. In fact, everything was here.[1]

One inaccuracy in the above account bears correction. *Dror-Habonim* was by no means the only movement that had bunkers at this time. The bunkers of *Hanoar Hazioni* were no less important, and it is known that *Betar* also had a bunker. In this instance, as in other similar cases, they operated according to the Resistance principle: "Take no interest in what

you don't have to know." As a result, certain sections of the Resistance had no knowledge of what was going on in other sections, and especially in other movements.

All the bunkers were dependent on external management which took care of regular supplies and communications with the outside, that is to say, a more or less efficient central administration, and a number of activists who could maintain permanent communication. A headquarters of this nature complicated the activities, but movements that wished to maintain bunkers had to take the risks involved. The occupants of the bunkers were almost exclusively members of a movement and activists in the Resistance. Most of them were in hiding either because of their appearance, or because they did not know the language, and were afraid to go out with Aryan papers. Some of them had been involved in some Resistance activity and had been imprisoned, or had been released from the labor service. In many cases people were transferred from one bunker to another, or assigned to different tasks, in accordance with the needs. A few stories will illustrate the kind of people involved.

Uri (Imre) Klein was with one of the many groups that had been caught at Kolozsvár at the beginning of May. He had fled from his labor service unit in order to leave with a *tiyul* which had, however, been apprehended, so that legally he was considered a deserter and faced a court martial. The prospects of a death sentence were practically certain. The other members of the group that had been caught, who were not deserters, were deported to Auschwitz. Klein was held back for his trial. He came to the conclusion that the only way of saving his life was to feign insanity, and indeed this saved him. After he had been in a good many of Budapest's prisons, the Resistance succeeded in having him released by use of a *Schutzpass.* This was one of the terrifying absurdities of the time, in that a deserter could not stand trial if physicians certified that he was insane, whereas hundreds of thousands of perfectly sane people were sent off to the gas chambers. In his testimony he told someting of the bunkers:

> Offenbach took me to the Columbus Camp in a Red Cross car. There Willy [Zeev Eisikovits] suggested that I go to the bunker in Hűvösvölgy. . . . . I accepted the command of this bunker. There was plenty of food. We also had weapons, submachine guns and rifles, and I taught the people there how to shoot. It was forbidden to

> leave the bunker in the daytime. There was an armed guard upstairs, and I instructed him to call a test alarm. In this way we had an exercise in what could happen if we should be found. I ordered that if we should be caught during the day, there should be no resistance. If we were found at night, we should all go outdoors, and at a given signal all begin to run, each one in a different direction, in the hope that at least some would get away.[2]

Additional testimonies are on hand, from which we learn something of the movement spirit and the Zionist character of the bunkers, and of the cultural life. In the words of Shmuel Szántó:

> My function there was to organize the social and cultural life. My wife was the liaison agent of the movement, and was sent on various errands. With the help of a few comrades I began to edit the movement publication. If I remember correctly, the name of the journal was *Life in the Bunker.* We made a number of copies on a typewriter and my wife took them to the head office of the movement, which then distributed them to all our units. We wrote most of the articles ourselves, and since we knew that the copies were reaching outside circles, we dwelt on the Zionist theme and the idea of resisting the Nazi regime. Several of the articles were sharply criticial of the regime. Some of these copies reached the hands of the authorities, and when we were caught many of us were beaten up because they wanted to know who had written those articles. . . . Though we practiced with weapons in the bunker, principally the pistol, we had no plan for resistance. We were quite naive. We had no watchman outside, and since were were cold, we stuffed up the emergency exit.[3]

Eli Shlomovits (Shalev), one of the more experienced activists in the Resistance, described what went on in the bunker which he commanded:

> The day after Szálasi's rise to power, 20 comrades and I went down into the bunker at Hungária Avenue. It was there that we heard that the parachutists had been arrested. We had built the bunker in a junkyard belonging to Uncle Szűcs. Entrance was through the abandoned

> junkyard office. The bunker was about six by four meters in size, and we set up couches in two layers. There was enough food, though we had no appetite. We were in good spirits, but we had to keep quiet in order not to attract attention. There was always a guard upstairs who could warn us by pressing a button. The place was about 150-200 meters from the nearest building.[4]

The role played by the bunkers in the whole rescue set-up is well described in a testimony published in Hungary immediately after the war. The following description is that of a 12-year-old boy, whose identity is unknown. The parentheses and the deletions appear in the Hungarian original:

> I reached the resistance movement bunker at Hungária Avenue. Food came from the outside. There was a large library, and we studied a lot. We were there for eight weeks, and then someone who wanted to save his own skin turned us in. The gendarmes surrounded the bunker, armed with machine guns and grenades. They called on us to surrender and our comrade, Marci Székely, who happened to be on guard, replied with a shot. The poor guy was hit by 37 bullets, from three different directions. The gendarmes blocked all exists. We were faced by a large force, and any resistance would have been hopeless. We gave up our pistols and come out, one by one. They fired at the first, but did not hit him. Out in the street were about 400 people, neighbors, who demanded that we all be executed at once. (The boy was taken to the military prison at Margit Avenue, and like the others, was sentenced to death). . . . I didn't confess. I gave a false name because I was afraid they would find out that Herta was my sister, and then they would torture her in front of me, or the other way around, to make her confess. I acted like a stupid 12-year-old who was so afraid of the police that he wouldn't lie for anything in the world. I didn't know anybody, and I didn't know there were weapons there, or how they got there. They showed me pictures, but of course I didn't recognize anyone. They threatened me constantly with a rubber truncheon and some kind of electric torture instrument if they would catch me lying, but I wasn't afraid. I was ready for them to kill us all. I knew the only thing we had left was not to reveal our comrades who were still at large.[5]

The events which led up to the capture of his bunker are described later. When these bunkers were set up, they were regarded by the Resistance as having a high degree of security, and this appraisal did indeed appear justified for two months. Not every movement had the same confidence in the bunkers, however, and the Resistance leadership engaged in endless dispute on the matter. In the end, as usual, each movement acted in accordance with its own outlook and opportunities.

The second movement which maintained bunkers was *Hanoar Hazioni,* and its methods were very similar to those of *Dror.* The activities of the movement were coordinated by Adoniyahu Billitzer (Dajnus). A few days after Szálasi assumed power, just as Billitzer was leaving a meeting in the Glass House, he was arrested on Vadász Street, together with dozens of other people. All the documents which were intended for distribution were in his briefcase, which was taken. After about a week of torture he was sent to prison, and it was relatively easy to get him out of there with a *Schutzpass* provided by Beregi, a lawyer on the staff at Vadász Street.

Dajnus set up the headquarters for *Hanoar Hazioni* in the office at József Avenue. Among other functions, the place was used for distribution of documents and for storage of food, intended also for the bunkers. The movement had four bunkers. The first was in a chemical supplies warehouse at Ranolder Street.[6] This was a sort of cellar, with a narrow window close to the ceiling, through which light came from the yard. Over the warehouse was a stable. As has been noted previously, during this time horse-drawn wagons were still a common form of transportation in Budapest, and during the war almost the only means of haulage. The wagoner was one of the members of the movement, and he lived in the stable. According to all indications, his external appearance, his rural accent, and the odor of the horses which reeked from him all combined to give him the authentic appearance of a wagoner. This was an excellent cover for the bunker, and also for communication with the outside world.

Another of the *Hanoar Hatzioni* bunkers was in Teréz Avenue, opposite the western railroad station. The place was a ticket office, and the comrades hid in the basement underneath. Located in the center of the city, this bunker was intended to serve as a refuge if needed by comrades working on the outside. There were only five or six people hidden at Ranolder Street, but 15 or 20 on Teréz Avenue.

The owner of both the ticket office and the chemical supplies warehouse was a member of the Hungarian Resistance who provided the hiding places for the Halutzim for ideological rather than financial reasons. For some reason, the confidence placed by the activists in these bunkers was much greater than warranted.

The largest bunker was in Buda, in a secluded area at the foot of the hills, and it was considered the safest. A great deal of food was accumulated there. However, its distance from residential areas meant that any unusual activity around it could arouse suspicion. In the end someone informed on it and an army and police force stormed it. Most of the people there were killed, and only one woman and her daughter were taken alive.

A smaller bunker was located in a basement on Vaskapu Street, a rundown area on the road to Csepel Isle, which served as a center for transportation companies, stables, and wagoners. It had ample storage space, and food brought here was sometimes used for other bunkers as well.

Only indirect information is availabel on the *Betar* bunker. The bunker at the technical university was closed down during the summer, and after October 15 a group of some five or ten members of *Betar* set up another in Zugló, one of the suburbs of Budapest. The hideaway was in the basement of an isolated family house. The rear was so covered that even someone who might enter by chance could not be aware of any presence. The house itself was deserted. There was food and water, and the people there were armed, but apparently careless. Perhaps they lit a fire to keep warm, and the smoke gave them away. Neighbors reported them, and an Arrow Cross unit came to investigate. The people in the bunker refused to come out, and a fight ensued in which all the *Betar* members were apparently killed.[7]

Hashomer Hatzair took a different tack. They concealed their comrades in a semi-hideaway placed at their disposal by members of the Communist resistance.

> We made our plans in such a way that in case of need our members could take part in activities. We had considered a joint resistance movement with Hungarians, but matters never reached the stage of large-scale armed exploits and open resistance . . . . We did put up several joint bunkers in warehouses and basements. During the day our comrades worked there as laborers, and during the night they

> remained in the bunker . . . . We had some bunkers in the suburbs as well, in industrial enterprises. Our comrades stayed with the Communists there, took part in their seminars, in distribution of leaflets, and in other underground activity.[8]

Members of other movements found concealment also in ordinary apartments. Thousands of Jews, not members of any movement, and with no connection with the Resistance, likewise hid away in cellars, in attics, in storerooms or in the business places of friends or gentile acquaintances.[9]

Nonetheless, the bunkers set up by the Resistance were a unique phenomenon under conditions existing in Budapest toward the end of the war. They constituted places of refuge for the survivors, as well as cells to assure the continued existence of the movement; and the members operated them with that in mind. This was the same principle which motivated the Halutz Resistance in most of its activities. The normal life of the movement continued without interruption, and in retrospect it appears that to a certain degree the movements carried on their usual activities even in underground conditions for the purpose of assuring such continuity, though this was certainly never expressed at the time.

The bunkers were an organic part of the activity of the movements within the Resistance. There was constant access to the bunkers and daily contact over and beyond what was necessary only to furnish food and basic necessities. There were visits there to encourage the occupants. The movement bulletin, which was Zionist-educational in content, was but one of the examples of activity which extended beyond the immediate needs for survival alone. The fact that many of the bunkers were discovered, and their occupants arrested, resulted directly from their operation in this way, as will be seen.

CHAPTER 13

THE BATTLE FOR LIFE

Even before the encirclement of Budapest on December 24, the bombed and shelled city was left with no reigning authority and without any administrative controls. Thousands of people, fleeing for their lives from the battle front and from the advancing Red Army, swarmed into the city from the east, adding to the confusion created by the thousands of local inhabitants who had to abandon their bombed-out homes. While vast multitudes were pouring into the capital, thousands of others were leaving, as the Arrow Cross regime sought to transfer to the west all government offices and such economic enterprises as could be dismantled and moved. They were not the only ones on the move. Everyone who felt that on the arrival of the Red Army he would have to give an accounting for his deeds was also packing up and fleeing westward.

Thousands of Jews, who had in various ways managed to evade the eye of the government, were caught amidst all this turmoil, with the war raging only a few dozen kilometers from the capital. Some estimates place their number at about 20,000. Many of them had no connection with the Resistance, and they received their Aryan documents from friends or from people who made a living in this way. Many others were helped at one stage or another by the Halutz Resistance, and were saved

thanks to the papers which it furnished. Resistance agents even succeeded in recalling many young people whose labor service units were being ordered to the west. Only a small minority could be provided with a haven in a legation or in one of the children's homes. During those difficult days salvation came, for the most part, to those who managed to survive the general confusion. About 80,000 Jews had been deported to Germany in one manner or another since Szálasi had come to power. That thousands were saved was because of the intensive efforts, constantly at great personal risk, of the staff members of the foreign legations and the Red Cross, many of whom were representatives of the Halutz Resistance.

In most cases, individuals saved individuals, and there is no way of measuring the full extent of all these operations. A few examples, drawn from testimonies, will serve in a small way to illustrate the nature of the efforts.[1]

One of the men in the ranks, who carried out various activities in the streets of Budapest, was Moshe Weisskopf. He possessed genuine Aryan papers, as well as certification from the International Red Cross that he was in its service. He was called upon to execute various missions, one of them connected with falsifying of Swiss protective passes, a project which served to indicate the extent to which the Consul, Charles Lutz, provided help over and beyind his diplomatic duties.

> At the request of Moshe Krausz I was to take a bundle of fifty *Schutzpässe* to Lutz in the Swiss legation, for stamping. I was approached by three movements, each with about twenty additional documents, and was asked to try to get them stamped also. Krausz telephoned ahead that he was sending the *Schutzpässe,* but instead of fifty I had more than a hundred . . . . The Consul did not count them, but instructed the clerk to be sure to stamp them all . . . . I pulled this trick many times.[2]

Later the difficulty became not so much to produce the documents as to assure that they would indeed reach those who needed them. The major problem was with the forced labor units. To be sure, in some cases men came with lists of the names of those in a unit, waited for the documents, and then took them back for the intended recipients. There were also cases in which lists were sent, and the Resistance had to seek ways of getting the precious papers to their destination:

> In one case Sanyi Grossman, who coordinated the preparation of the false *Schutzpässe* at Vadász Street, gave me a package of passes for a [labor service] unit that was located somewhere on Üllői Avenue, on the other side of town. We were supposed to give the documents to the commander, so that he would release the men. We didn't know the exact address, and it wasn't until nightfall that we found the place. We entered, and they were surprised to see us, because the headquarters was very close to the front. They couldn't understand how we had reached them. When we told the commander the purpose of our visit, he was even more astonished. He said that anything to do with the Jews was a matter for the Arrow Cross, and he asked one of the soldiers to phone them to come over. I thanked him, politely; what else could I do? . . . . When he saw that we were not disturbed, he invited us to have a cup of coffee with him. . . .
>
> When the Arrow Cross people came and saw us drinking coffee they asked for our papers and inquired why we were engaged in saving Jews. We replied that the Red Cross was also saving Hungarian soldiers who had been captured by the Russians. We asked them to deliver the *Schutzpässe* to the men, but they didn't want to. They also didn't want us to go to the camp to deliver them ourselves, but we finally agreed that the commander who had received us would see to their delivery. The following day we learned that they were indeed handed over, for we met one of the men who had been released.[3]

The camp on Columbus Street was an unusual phenomenon. After October 15 it was still fully occupied by about 3000 women, children, aged, and many men who had deserted from the labor service, all of them due to leave with the second transport, which never did depart. It was then placed under the protection of the International Red Cross. An Arrow Cross force, ignoring the immunity granted by the Red Cross, entered the camp early in December. The occupants sought to defend themselves, with the result that a number of the attackers were wounded.[4] In revenge, a number of Jews were killed on the spot, and the remainder were taken to one of the usual concentration points, a sports field, where they were sorted out and divided up. The elderly and the children were sent to the ghetto. The women were held together in one house on Teleki

Square. The men were sent to the railroad station, whence they were to be shipped to the west. Feverish attempts were at once undertaken to rescue the latter two groups:

> We learned that the men had already been placed in railroad cars at the station . . . . My young brother and a number of friends were among them. We took a truckload of food from one of the storerooms, and during the evening went to the station. With me was a chap by the name of Salamon, from Kolozsvár, who had good Gestapo documents, and wore an impressive leather jacket.
>
> We located the cars with the men. The guards were gendarmes, and we convinced them to let us distribute the food which had been sent by the Red Cross, with Gestapo approval. Two men descended from each car to receive the cases of food. The gendarmes stood by us all the time, and none of the men could escape.
>
> The following day we went to the women, and here we had a bit of luck. We parked the truck on the street, opposite the entrance, with lots of people around. Inside the house there was general disorder . . . . We required assistance in unloading the food, and called to the women to come help. The Arrow Cross men tried to straighten things out, but those women who went outside and had a little daring, did not return. When we finished, we claimed that several of the women had come with us, and we took them away in the truck. Those who had somewhere to go, went there; the others we had to put up in children's homes, in offices or elsewhere. . . . There was nothing we could do for the men beyond bringing them food, and their train was sent west. It was only a few days later that we learned that for some reason the train had stopped at a small town in western Hungary, about a hundred kilometers from Budapest, and that the men were still aboard.[5]

Attempts were immediately made to send a car to the place, with the aim of extending help, or even releasing some of them, or preventing their being sent to Germany. This effort was organized by György Aczél, a member of the Communist Party, who had been sent by the "Line" as liaison with the Rescue Committee. Aczél was a courageous and dynamic personality. He had several times engaged in rescue activities and was

quite familiar with the deportation routes across the border in western Hungary.

> We organized at once. György Aczél brought a truck with a driver and another escort, and we later learned that they were from the Communist Resistance. They had a rifle and a pistol. I was in command of this group. . . . We loaded the truck with food from the storehouse on Vadász Street, and took off. En route we were stopped many times. I also saw the Death March on the road. . . . We did not locate the train, and when we got to Győr we had to return. Crestfallen, we reported to Aczél and to Komoly that we had failed, ...We had done everything we could. We had distributed some of the food on the road, and had even given some to the Arrow Cross so that they should let us pass, but we had not found the train.[6]

One of the tasks which the Resistance undertook was to go out to the roads leading to the German border, where the death march was taking place. For over a month, from November 8 and until the complete encirclement of Budapest on December 24, tens of thousands of Jews were herded by the Arrow Cross, the police and the Hungarian gendarmerie on a forced walk to the border town of Hegyeshalom, where they were handed over to the Germans as labor for the war industries.[7] Not all of them reached the border station. Many fell during the March and died or were murdered by the Hungarian escorts. This was one of the most ruthless inflictions of all, carried out in broad daylight, on the open roads, for all to see. The route was about 200 to 220 kilometers in length, depending on the various roads, and the deportees covered it in from seven to eight days, without an orderly supply of food or water, without rest or shelter en route, and of course without medical attention. The deportees themselves attested that their conditions "improved" immeasurably from the moment they were handed over to the SS.

Two or three days before their departure on the March, the people were gathered in one of the sports fields in Budapest, or in the open lots of brick factories around the city. Living conditions were so terrible at the concentration points and during the March that even those who succeeded in reaching the border alive were in a completely deteriorated

physical condition. The Germans complained that most of the Jews who were being "loaned" to them for labor service were useless, and in some cases even refused to accept them.

Rescue attempts began at the assembly points. Jews subject to foreign protection were exempt from deportation, so that the tendency was to try to get people out on the grounds of such immunity. Representatives of the various legations, diplomats like Wallenberg, Jews and non-Jews alike, who appeared in the name of the legations, made desperate attempts in this direction. Members of the Resistance were usually dispatched as representatives of the Swiss legation or the Red Cross. They came with trucks to distribute food, and on their return sometimes succeeded in concealing a few people in the vehicles.

Toward the end of November reports of the Holocaust taking place along the roads of Transdanubia began to come in, at first from Hungarian policemen who could not contain their sense of shock, and later from the representatives of the legations who had been sent with lists of their "wards," in an effort to save some of them. Kepes (Kadmon), who traveled the route to Hegyeshalom, told of the attempts to help.

> When the death march began I was sent to try to get people out, to help whenever possible, and to bring back information on what was happening on the road to the border. I traveled in a Red Cross car on these important missions, and played the role of a representative of the International Red Cross. Why was I sent? Firstly, because I did not look Jewish. Secondly, I had a good accent, from Debrecen, and spoke like a Hungarian with roots in the towns of the lowlands. I also spoke German well, and was able to establish human contact with everyone . . . . I came from a provincial town and was familiar with the Magyar gentry. I knew how they passed the time, how they drank and how they listened to gypsy music. I acquired their habits and their typical expressions, that certain "something" which at first glance distinguishes a lad from "a good home" from everyone else. Sometimes there was nothing that could be done to help, but we had to do something. Once, on a rainy day at the end of November, I was sent to the brick factory at Kőbánya. There were about a thousand people there, waiting to be "shipped." It was impossible to prevent the deportation,

> but I managed to obtain its postponement until the following morning. The next day I was no longer there, but neither were about half the people. I did not dare appear in that place again. If I am not mistaken, I traveled the road from Budapest to the Austrian border three times. Each time I had to extricate some people from groups of 700-800. I don't know if I saved a hundred or two hundred, but we did bring people back, and settled them in protective houses, or in the ghetto.[8]

Kepes was one of the typical Resistance characters during this period. Aryan documents, vital to be sure, were only the first requirement for embarking on a course of action. Each activist had to draw upon his own personality and his own abilities to meet situations as they arose. The most successful ones were those young Hungarians who were familiar with the environment, and could blend into it without arousing any suspicion. At the same time, they had to be possessed of a full measure of daring which at times verged on recklessness.

The inner logic which guided the activities of the Resistance, whether as part of an organized plan or as the result of individual initiative, becomes evident in a review of the activity. One of the basic principles in this logic was the determination that while the Resistance could not solve all the problems of all the Jews, it did have the power to assist many in going from extremely dangerous situations to places which were less dangerous. Thus, a deportation group headed for the camps in Germany was in extreme danger, bearing in mind that it was not yet clear at that time that such a destination did not necessarily mean Auschwitz. The ghetto was also dangerous, but less so than a transport, and so on, down through the protected houses, the legations, the bunkers, and the ability of a person to take care of himself with "good" papers.

Another basic principle which guided the Resistance was that if it were possible to rescue only a few of the Jews, in every case children and youth should be given priority over adults and the aged. This line was determined not only because children were more helpless and more easily harmed, but because it was a direct consequence of the Zionist approach, and the character of the youth movements. The choice was difficult indeed, but in their view it was dictated by national requirements. This consideration was sometimes openly expressed, and sometimes

was the result of subconscious feelings, but it is to be found with startling consistency at every stage and under all the changing conditions, and not only in the more obvious circumstances which led to the establishment of the children's homes.

The activities of the Resistance at this time differed from those in the earlier period in that the greater part of the effort was now devoted to rescuing not just members of the movements, but ever broader elements of the general Jewish population. Another difference was in the maintenance of much closer relations with external elements, chief among them the Swiss legation and the Red Cross. In addition there was special significance to the contacts established with Hungarian resistance groups which were beginning to take shape.

Reference has already been made to the Magyar Front, which was the focal point of the political opposition in Hungary beginning in May 1944. During this period another movement was created, the Hungarian National Independence Front (*Magyar Nemzeti Függetlenségi Front*) which was under Soviet influence, and had its headquarters in Moscow. It was this body which established the anti-Fascist government in liberated Debrecen in December 1944, and assumed control immediately after liberation. A third body which came into being in conquered Hungary, in fact a continuation of the Magyar Front, was known as the Liberating Committee of the Hungarian National Uprising (*Magyar Nemzeti Felkelés Felszabaditó Bizottsága*). This new group was little different from its predecessor, and it came into existence principally because its leader, Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, wished to obtain the support of new elements which had hitherto supported the Regent, or had not yet been prepared to come out openly against him. Despite the Communist influence which made itself felt, the National Liberating Committee emphasized primarily its opposition to the Szálasi regime. Bajcsy-Zsilinszky still recognized Horthy as the legal head of state and the Committee endorsed the Regent's appeal for an armistice on October 15. At the same time it incorporated in its program requests for drastic social changes and for future cooperation with the Soviet Union. From a political point of view this was a widely variegated body, held together only by the events of the closing days of the war, and the common opposition to the Szálasi regime.[9]

Upon the establishment of the National Liberating Committee on November 9, it was decided to set up also a military arm, which was to be

headed by retired General János Kiss. Kiss was a professional soldier, forced to retire in 1939 because of his anti-German views. The military wing of the Communist resistance, which had hitherto engaged primarily in propaganda within the army, was also attached to this command.

The particular importance of the National Liberating Committee was that it succeeded in promoting joint action by elements with diversified political outlooks. As a result of betrayal, most of the members, including the leader, Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, were arrested on November 22 or immediately thereafter. Because of its short period of existence, this group was of symbolic rather than tangible significance. Kiss and two other members of the military command were sentenced to death at the military prison on Margit Avenue, and were executed on December 8. Bajcsy-Zsilinszky was not tried immediately because he was still a member of parliament, and as such enjoyed immunity. It was curious indeed that the judges gave consideration to this immunity, since he had previously been arrested and held in jail for six months, and had been arrested again, all this despite his parliamentary immunity. Nor was he the only member of the Hungarian Parliament who, since the German occupation, has been arrested and sent to concentration camps. This lack of consistency, and the strange form of respect for legitimacy, were typical of the period, particularly under Arrow Cross rule. In the end, not unexpectedly, his immunity was lifted by the Hungarian Parliament, or what was left of it, at a session held in Sopron. Out of fear that the Red Army might arrive momentarily, the trial too was transferred to that city in western Hungary, and Bajcsy-Zsilinskzy was executed there. After the elimination of the Liberating Committee, a few resistance groups still remained in Budapest. These were still in early stages of organization, and because the leadership had been wiped out there was little coordination between them, and no clarity as to precisely what they were supposed to do.

Further details on an important point of contact between the various Hungarian resistance groups on the one hand, and the Halutz Resistance on the other were provided in extracts of testimony by David Gur (Grosz) in which the further wanderings of the laboratory were described:

> They needed us because we were the only ones who could furnish them with false documents of superior quality. One of our newest contacts was Pál Fábry, an official in the Foreign Ministry, who

> represented the lower Hungarian aristocracy. He was among those who were able and willing to help . . . . The Communist, Iván Kádár, was also of help, and got us a place to operate . . . . We were located in the offices of the Csaba association in the Science University on Baross Street, working as auxiliary security forces, and we dressed accordingly. Several times we had phone calls from students who wished to volunteer for service with the forces. At that time our workshop was not only employed for the Jewish Resistance, but was also an important factor in the general Resistance movement. Our inventory was contained in six suitcases. We were able to create any European document.

Because of his work, Gur was familiar with most of the contacts which the Halutz Resistance had with Hungarian anti-Fascist elements. He mentioned many of them in his testimony:

> Among the major resistance groups with which we were in constant contact: Vand der Waals and his group, which included Dutch and British officers who had escaped from POW camps in Germany. . . . We had widespread contacts with Pál Demény's group, of the underground workers' movement. We provided them with documents, and they placed at our disposal hideaways in the industrial enterprises in the Fourteenth District. . . . Sándor Futó-Galambos represented the official line of the Communist Party in the Resistance. Through him our documents reached the leaders of the illegal Communist Party, including Károly Kiss. Lt. Iván Kádár represented the university student groups, the officers who were involved in the uprising, Vilmos Tartsai and László Sólyom. Kádár was one of the few who could make a substantial contribution. To complete the picture, we must mention a few more names among the many to whom we furnished false papers. They filled or still fill important positions in Hungarian public life. There were Tibor Déri and Iván Boldizsár, major personalities in literature, József Köböl, Lajos Drahos, and György Markos, who occupied key positions in the trade unions in the Communist Party and government in Hungary. There were others who did not receive their documents directly from us, but men like László Rajk and Gábor Péter, who later

> occupied important posts in the Hungarian Communist Party, bore documents produced by our workshops. Other Communist activists like Mátyás Timár, Béla Szilágyi, Gyula Mihala and Károly Klement, carried papers which we had produced.[10]

Most of the people mentioned held senior positions in the Communist regime. In addition to the above testimony, Gur has provided the author with a special affidavit regarding his personal connection with the aforementioned László Sólyom, who was later chief of staff of the Hungarian army.

There were also extremely important contacts between the Halutz Resistance and the Hungarian anti-Fascists within the Auxiliary Units (*Kisegitő Karhatalmi Alakulat*) known as KISKA, for short. These units began to be organized by the new regime at the same time that the Liberating Committee of the Hungarian National Uprising came into existence, toward the end of October. They operated against hostile internal elements as a sort of armed political force, in addition to the party units already mentioned. In every respect they were under overall army command and were organized according to districts in the capital. Some units of the KISKA were infiltrated by the very persons against whom they were supposed to be functioning, and some of these quickly made use of the legal cover to carry out various resistance activities. Such exploitation of the units enabled the solution of problems which could not be solved in any other way.

As has been noted previously, the general mobilization made it impossible for a young man to go about the streets of the capital without being looked upon as a deserter; even Aryan papers were of no avail. On the other hand, documents attesting to service with one of the KISKA units were an ideal cover, and especially because they did not have to be falsified. They were genuine, and could be verified with the units themselves. Members of the KISKA could also carry weapons legally, though some of the units had neither weapons nor uniforms because of shortages.

The full significance and importance of this framework for the general operations of the Resistance are difficult to appraise because research on the subject is still scanty, and what has been done tends to exaggerate the role played by the Communists and minimize the roles of others. It is clear, however, that during the short period when such affiliation with

the KISKA was possible, many anti-fascist elements seized upon it, among them the sons of aristocrats and of statesmen who had been members of the previous regime. For example, the son of former Prime Minister Kállay was among those assigned to guard the house on Vadász Street. The son of Szakasits, the Social Democratic leader, was also in one of the units. Hundreds of young men from the trade unions, and the remnants of the students who had been close to the populist groups (népiek) —one of whose leaders, Imre Kovács, had been a member of Bajcsy-Zsilinsky's Committee—joined the units. Communist youth, members of the Halutz Resistance, and Jews who had deserted the labor service, all found a convenient temporary refuge in the new units of the KISKA.

The Halutz Resistance found the KISKA of great value. It provided an additional legal framework within which members of the Resistance could go about in relative security. Units were also used for guard duty at various institutions, among them the Red Cross and the Swiss legation. They were the ones who provided protection for Vadász Street as well as for the office on Wekerle Street and a few Red Cross offices which were maintained by the Resistance. Part of the security for the children's homes and for the protected houses of the various legations was also provided by these units.

The nature of each KISKA group was determined by its immediate commander, who had full power to permit or forbid various activities. Unit No. 13/1, commanded by Lajos Gidófalvi, was of special importance because it included a number of Resistance members.[11] A number of times it succeeded in preventing transfers from various children's homes to the ghetto. It also extended support to several protected houses of the Red Cross, to Komoly's office, which was then at 19 Munkácsi Street, and to another children's home at 35 Benczur Street.

The guard and protection duties were carried out as time and conditions permitted. The KISKA units had neither the authority nor the technical ability to place fixed guards in sufficient number at all the children's homes, protected houses and other places where Jews were, so as to prevent possible assaults by Arrow Cross gangs. It should be kept in mind that the Fascist groups disturbed non-Jews as well—for example, among them monks from certain monasteries whom they suspected, often without cause, were harboring Jews. The best the KISKA units could do was to try to be near the trouble spot, or to get there as quickly as possible when

they learned of an attack. In this regard, the KISKA was able to chalk up a number of important achievements.

The KISKA units also constituted a convenient point of contact for various resistance elements, and created wider possibilities for cooperation and mutual help. As a result, many Hungarian non-Jews also took part in the various efforts to protect Jewish lives. This made it possible to mobilize much larger forces, and more than once the success of an operation was assured by the fact that those who came to prevent a deportation were more numerous than those who sought to carry it out.

Another important area in which the Halutzim provided assistance to the general resistance was in food supplies, especially during the siege. A Hungarian research study offers the following testimony:

> Our food supply, for a unit of forty partisans, became very low, and we had to tap every source to get more food. At Garay Square we got oil, sugar, and other necessities from a KISKA unit. A few days later my contact man, Béla Hegedüs, put me in touch with Gyurka Non, and he gave me an order good for a week's supply for 30 men. We got the food at the Swiss office of the International Red Cross, and transferred it by horse and wagon, under heavy guard.[12]

The researcher added to his testimony:

> György Non was in 1942 sentenced to eight years in prison for illegal Communist activities. On December 11 he escaped from the prison at Margit Avenue, and following instructions from his comrade, Károly Kiss, established contact with the partisan units of Kőbánya, Turcsányi and Megyeri. He carried out organizational, communications and supply functions under Party direction. In this connection he obtained supplies for Kőbánya's unit from the International Red Cross . . . . He is now deputy director of the Kossuth publishing firm.[13]

In his casual designation of Megyeri's "partisan unit," the Hungarian researcher does not bother to explain certain important elements. One is that Joseph Megyeri was the underground name for Joseph Meyer, one of

the leaders of the Halutz Resistance. This helps to clarify the identity of his "partisans," whose existence was hushed up. It must be added that Joseph Meyer occupied rather important positions in Hungary after the liberation, so that it should not have been difficult to ascertain his true name and his political connections in the Resistance. György Non was a personal friend of Meyer's and served as Liaison with the Halutz Resistance. The cooperation between the two was quite close during the short period between his release from prison and the liberation of the city by the Red Army. Furthermore, the office which supplied the food was none other than one of the storerooms which Sanyi Grossman had set up on Wekerle Street. It did indeed bear the legal cover of the Red Cross and the Swiss legation, but by that time everyone knew, and certainly a student of the period should have known, that this was but a cover for the activities of the Halutz Resistance.

The Garay Square area, mentioned in the testimony, was in the territory of KISKA unit No. 14/2, whose membership, testimony shows, included leftists, Jewish labor servicemen and members of the Halutz Resistance. They guarded a number of institutions and houses in which Jews were hidden, including the Home for Crippled Children on Mexikói Avenue, another children's home on Bocskai Street, and protected houses on Abonyi Street. Several times they were able to avert deportation of children. Units of this KISKA company were in touch with Josef Meyer, and from his testimony it may be learned that the food supply and weapons, at least in part, originated with the Halutz Resistance.

Joseph Meyer was a central figure in the ever-deepening relations with the Communist resistance. He took Marxist ideology very seriously and even in the early 1940s maintained that a Marxist-Zionist who did not go on *aliyah* to Palestine should participate in local politics. Many of those who thought as he did sooner or later became closely identified with the Communist Party. There was considerable friction on this subject between Meyer and the leadership of his movement, especially during the period when Zvi Szilágyi was the dominant ideologist of the movement. This background of close acquaintanceship and complete confidence in him by both sides made Joseph Meyer a welcome and effective liaison in both resistance movements.

The Communists continued to suffer from internal division even after October, a fact which in underground conditions contributed to

uncertainty on the part of the rank-and-file members. As the German occupation approached its end, there were also differences of opinion between the various groups with regard to the role which a resistance movement should play under existing conditions. Many local activists were inclined to organize fighting units which, when the time came, could sabotage the German war effort and wage an armed revolt as the Red Army approached Budapest. Others, following the line advocated by Moscow, were opposed to an uprising in the form of what they termed a military *putsch,* believing that it would have results similar to those that occurred in Warsaw in August 1944.[14]

The rationale for the official Communist policy was quite clear. The party had been persecuted and had operated in the underground for more than 20 years. It was weak in numbers, and enjoyed very little public support. More than any other group except the Jews, it had suffered unending oppression on the part of the regime. Its members had been hounded and arrested. Many who had never been revealed as Communists, suffered because they were Jews. From a party point of view, therefore, it was more important and more practical to assure at least a minimal cadre for the post-liberation period than to dissipate political strength on a military effort whose outcome was in any event doubtful.

Central coordination on the upper levels of the Hungarian Front was conducted under the auspices of the Committee headed by Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, and with the participation of László Rajk, representing the Communist Party. Before this body was eliminated on November 22, it reached a clear decision, largely under Rajk's influence, against a general uprising. By way of compromise, and to meet at least some of the demands coming from the lower ranks, principally the circles close to Pál Demény, small armed groups were organized, most of them within the framework of the KISKA. They were engaged in limited sabotage and disturbance activities, and at minimal risk. This approach, which resulted from considerations based on local conditions and the scope of the forces available to the Hungarian resistance, was an appropriate basis for cooperation with the Halutz Resistance, which had similar aims, but faced much greater dangers. Groups like these are mentioned both in the evidence published in Hungary and in the testimony of the Halutzim.

Joseph Meyer's friend, György Non, was from the beginning of December the major liaison between the Halutz Resistance and the Communist

Resistance, largely under the inspiration of "the line," that is, the faction which received its direction from Moscow. Meyer's testimony on this score confirms to an amazing degree the Hungarian source quoted previously:

> We first heard the details of Hannah Szenes's last days in the Margit Avenue prison from Non. He managed to get away from the prison, and contact was established with us on that very day. We supplied him with false papers and a hiding place for the first few days . . . . He put me in touch with the commander of the Kőbánya partisan unit, and I was asked to organize a supply line, parallel to the military line. In addition, I placed at the disposal of the partisan commander all the arms and ammunition in our arsenal at Almási Square. I also connected him with several cells that had no contact.
>
> During the siege of Budapest I organized armed patrols composed of young people. These patrols, which appeared to be Arrow Cross units, had two purposes:
>
> 1. We extricated Jews from the Arrow Cross mobs and the militia on the grounds that killing them was our job.
>
> 2. When conditions were appropriate, we shot as many Arrow Cross men as possible. I infiltrated several of our comrades into the KISKA forces. They too were on day and night alert and carried out armed patrols in the vicinity of the ghetto.[15]

Beginning early in December, and especially toward the end of the siege, when it was no longer possible to get Jews out of the city, an orgy of mass murders of Jews took place on the banks of the Danube. People were killed night after night, and their bodies tossed into the river. At times advance information was received on a proposed activity of this kind, and efforts were made to get the people out of their houses by sending armed members of the Resistance, dressed in one uniform or another. In a few cases the Resistance members were able to rescue Jews who were already on their way to the Danube. It is impossible to estimate how many lives were saved in these feats, nor is it possible to know how many of those saved in that way managed to survive to the end.

In many cases the KISKA units were used to guard the food shipments to the protected houses and to the children's homes. Because of the

shortage of food, which was growing ever more critical, each shipment was made at great risk, since Arrow Cross units would waylay the consignments, and it was usually necessary to make a deal with them, whereby they would get part of the merchandise.[16]

The KISKA units did not last long. It appears that the exploitation of this set-up by various resistance elements, and the difficulties which ensued, resulted in its liquidation. As has been noted, these units clashed with Arrow Cross members more than once, and at times pitched street battles were fought. There can be no doubt that the source of such activities was not lost upon the authorities, despite the general disintegration. At the beginning of January, during the last days of Nazi rule, and only about ten days before the liberation of the eastern part of the city (Pest), which included the ghetto and all the units mentioned here, hundreds of Resistance people were arrested, tortured, and killed.

One member of the Halutz Resistance told of his "service" with KISKA unit No. 13/1, and of his arrest: (Parentheses appear in the original).

> When I enlisted I was present during discussions between the Resistance movements . . . . I remember one such discussion in the Vilmos Barracks and another at Vadász Street. That was when they gathered all those who had been cut off in Budapest, and set up the KISKA units. They suggested I join up, so I did. At the Vilmos Barracks I found several men from the Zionist movement in a platoon of about 40 or 50. . . . I was the commander of our platoon, with the rank of sergeant major [*karpaszományos őrmester*] . . . . We were given guard duty over Vadász Street and the children's homes at Benczur Street, where our movement had about ten people. . . .
>
> Our best operations were connected with our night patrols. Legally we were soldiers, and a soldier is a soldier, always and everywhere, even there! At night we used to go around in groups of 40 or 50; our purpose was to get Jews out of the hands of the Arrow Cross people. . . . Everybody used to shoot in those days, and we would fire, too. . . . When we would see a group of Fascists with Jews, we would stop them. We were soldiers, and there were more of us. As a general rule, we would ask to see their orders; who gave the order? What did the order say? We would simply

tell them that this was not their function; or we would say that we already had a bunch of Jews, and we would do the whole thing in one fell swoop, with a submachine gun, or something. The important thing was that they should see that it was not worth their while to start anything with us. Sometimes we would meet them in the center of town, and sometimes near the Danube. Sometimes we would get there five minutes late. But one night the whole thing ended. The barracks were attacked by an Arrow Cross unit which had heard about our "bestiality". . . . They demanded our weapons. I said that I would not give up my pistol. I had earned the German Iron Cross (I made sure it was pinned on my uniform) and if the Germans considered me worthy of this decoration, nobody was entitled to take my weapon away from me. They took us to 60 Andrássy Avenue, the party headquarters. They separated the officers, and I as a sergeant-major was considered an officer. One of the "brothers" made a speech. At the end he announced that we had to swear allegiance to Szálasi. We willingly agreed. In the evening they gave us some cans of food and sent us to the front. Some were assigned to the area around the Eastern Railway Station, and I was sent to one of the positions in Buda.

The Russians were firing at Buda, and I didn't like that. I prepared an order for myself, commanding me to report again at party headquarters, took a few cans of food and a few hundred cigarettes and began to walk. I walked from nine in the evening until five the following morning, when I reached our comrades at Benczur Street. That was on January 12.[17]

It is not known to what extent the rounding up of the KISKA units at the end of December and the beginning of January affected the Halutz Resistance. In the absence of information it is reasonable to assume that not many were hurt. There is no doubt, however, that those who were affected were the survivors of the labor service units, or Jews who for ideological or other reasons had joined the Communist resistance.

One of the principal reasons for the wave of arrests was the attack carried out by a Communist group on a large Arrow Cross meeting in the Municipal Theater. Available sources are not sufficient to permit any estimate as to the extent of Jewish participation in the Communist

resistance, though it is quite clear that it was very large, and far in excess of the proportion of Jews to the general population. Those in this attack party were Dezső-Szir Weinberger, head of the group, Gábor Csillik, Alfréd Fürszt, Anna Fridmann, and Miklós Weinberger.[18] Four of the five were Jews.

In various publications, including testimony given by members of the Communist resistance, many of the names mentioned are obviously those of Jews. However, since the majority of Hungarian Jews bore Hungarian-sounding names, these sources could indicate only a small proportion of the Jews who participated with the Communists. Evidence given by members of the Halutz Resistance who had been arrested at various times indicates that a significant number of the Communists arrested were Jewish youth. Some of them had come to Communism for purely ideological reasons, whereas others had joined for the practical reason that this was the only consistently anti-Fascist organization that they could find. Present research is unable to provide even partial information as to how many Jewish young people in Hungary outside the Halutz took part in various anti-Nazi resistance movements. Only a serious and comprehensive study will be able to provide an answer.

The community's orphan homes were in two locations in Budapest, one at 25-27 Queen Vilma Avenue, and the other at 5-7 Mihály Munkácsi Street. Both were outside the ghetto. Unlike the children's homes, these institutions had existed previously, under community auspices. When Szálasi came to power these homes, like all other institutions which were still functioning, came under the protection of the Red Cross, which is to say, Department A, the Zionist Department, and of the Spanish and Swedish legations. This change was not a mere formality. The Resistance felt the same sense of responsibility for these homes as for the others, and also began to send additional children to them, far in excess of their normal capacity. At Munkácsi Street, which had hitherto housed 800 children at the most, the number of occupants rose to 1200.

From the moment that the ghetto was established, the authorities persistently demanded that the concentration of all the city's Jews should include also the children's homes. Negotiations on this subject between the foreign legations and the authorities were prolonged and wearying. Many attempts were made to evacuate the children's homes, and the orphan homes too did not escape visits by the police or by Arrow Cross

men seeking to transfer the children to the ghetto. Such efforts were foiled at the last moment. On December 24, and the very day on which the siege was made complete, the orphans were taken out of both homes. Protests by the Red Cross and by the Swedish legation, were of no avail.

The children from Munkácsi Street were at first taken to the Radeczky Barracks, on the other side of the city. During the evacuation of the building three children and three adults, two of them elderly women, were murdered. One of the teachers described the incident (parentheses and quotation marks are in the original):

> For hours we stood in the yard of the barracks, four or five women and elderly men, and about a thousand children, facing dozens of murderers armed with machine guns. I nursed a faint hope that while we were passing through the city some of the more courageous boys had been able to get away. According to plans prepared for contingencies like this, they were to go directly to a number of addresses known to them (the Swiss and Swedish legations, Ottó Komoly's office in the Red Cross Building, and the headquarters of the Zionist Resistance) and summon help to save the lives of the children. . . . At two o'clock I sensed movement at the camp gates. An officer arrived and asked that all the children be moved to the ghetto. Later I learned that our young "messengers" did indeed reach their destinations. At each address they reported what was happening, and that was how we were taken out of the military camp just in time.[19]

The fate of the second house was no less appalling. These children never reached the barracks. The Arrow Cross men who were guarding them received instructions to transfer them to Sip Street, where the Jewish Council and the leadership of the ghetto were located. There was a tragic misunderstanding, and the children were taken to Szív Street, which was not in the ghetto. They were arbitrarily put into two houses at Nos. 33 and 46. The building superintendent, seeing 140 Jewish children being placed on Christmas Eve in a house for which he was responsible, ran at once to the Arrow Cross people and asked that they be taken away, for he knew Jews were forbidden to be outside the ghetto. Three Arrow Cross men appeared at once and on the spot killed two children, aged nine

and 16. The remainder of the children and the adults were arranged in lines and began to march in the direction of the Danube. On the way about 30 children managed to escape. At the Danube, two children and a teacher were killed, and finally the rest were returned to the orphan home. The Arrow Cross escort demanded a "receipt for 70 children only," even though more were returned. They maintained that they had received instructions to kill about half the youngsters and return only 70.

The episodes of the two orphan homes were typical of the brutality of the Arrow Cross. They corrobrated the general policy which, since the beginning of December, had sought to eliminate all the protected places outside the ghetto walls. Two days earlier, all the children and the adult staff at two homes which were under Swedish protection were sent to the ghetto. Some of the adults were genuine Swedish nationals. Among those in the group was Asta Nilsson, a representative of the Swedish Red Cross, and a member of the Swedish royal family, who was engaged in rescuing children. The foreign citizens were of course released on the same day, but the children were kept in the ghetto and remained there until the liberation.

The Budapest ghetto was set up at the beginning of December and on the tenth of the month fenced around with wooden boards.[20] This ghetto, which was unlike those known in Eastern Europe, or the ghettos in Hungary's provincial towns, was quickly organized and enclosed within a few days. It comprised some three square kilometers out of the 200-square-kilometer total area of the city. About 4000 apartments with something over 7000 rooms were made available to the Jews in this area. On the eve of the liberation close to 70,000 Jews lived under these conditions. The area was completely Jewish, with Jewish institutions and synagogues, although before the establishment of the ghetto only about 3500 Jews lived there, most of them Orthodox and poor. In addition to the fearfully crowded conditions there were no facilities for such a large population completely lacking in any possibility of economic self-maintenance, and dependent entirely on community aid, especially for its food supplies. This dependence was made even more acute because the ghetto population was composed in the main of the elderly, children, pregnant women, and the ill. Most of those between the ages of 16 and 60 had been sent to Germany or had gone underground.

From the moment the ghetto was constituted, the authorities continued their efforts to concentrate the children's homes there. Almost daily the various neutral legations, and Ottó Komoly as head of Department A of the Red Cross, were in touch with the authorities seeking to prevent such removal, or at least to create further delay. Simultaneously, the Resistance was carrying on its own diligent efforts to prevent removal of the children from the protected homes. These efforts were exerted not on the political-diplomatic level but on that of the street and the submachine gun. Such efforts were of extreme importance because in many instances the hostile moves were made on the initiative of some local subunit of the Arrow Cross, or a local officer in a certain quarter, who wished to display his own zeal. In such circumstances, only physical defense on the spot could help.

In the case of the two orphan homes which were raided on Christmas Eve, there is no evidence to indicate any intervention made in their behalf, but it is reasonable to assume that Komoly and his people immediately appealed to the authorities. By the time the Resistance members operating in the ranks of the KISKA arrived there, the children were already gone. It is not clear why these children were removed and why all of them were not killed. Very likely there had been intercession on their behalf from higher echelons, perhaps under the influence of a powerful protest by the heads of all the neutral legations, including the Nuncio Rotta, which had been presented to the Hungarian government the previous day.[21]

Strange to relate, most of the children's homes were unharmed. This was a result of the combined efforts, not always coordinated in advance, of the diplomatic legations, Wallenberg, Lutz, Born, and Baránszki on the one hand, and the members of the Resistance on the other. Ottó Komoly, who took an active part in all the contacts between the remnants of the diplomatic corps, was the link between the two operating levels. In most cases the Resistance was able to prevent or at least delay removal of the children from the homes. Despite persistent pressure by the authorities to concentrate all the children's homes within the precincts of the ghetto, there was never any certainty as to the intentions of the attackers, and the killings during the evacuation of the home on Munkácsi Street served as dire warning. The contact between the various homes and the Resistance activists was on a close day-to-day basis, but often it was not days but minutes that counted, and help had to be sent immediately.

One day an Arrow Cross force attacked the children's homes on Nagyfuvaros Street, and the staff members there immediately telephoned Komoly. Kepes was dispatched at once, wearing his leather jacket, carrying an elegant briefcase, and wearing his gold-framed spectacles. Kepes' own testimony on this subject is incomplete, but the details provided are excellent examples of the sort of elements which can contribute to a successful rescue:

> One evening a call was received [at Komoly's office] that an Arrow Cross unit had attacked one of the children's homes, and the youngsters were already being lined up in the street. I was told to get into a car and rush there at once. I don't remember all the details, but what I do recall is that I sat with the commander of that unit in a nearby saloon, and we finished off the night at the Small Royal [a night club—A.C.], where I later woke up. But the children were not taken anywhere. I remained on good terms with that Fascist, and I nursed the contact along intensively. One day he phoned me and told me that a rival Arrow Cross unit, with which he had feuded, had attacked a protected house on Pozsonyi Road [under Swedish protection—A.C.] and asked if I wouldn't like to see what was going on there. I did want to see, and I got there in time.[22]

After October 15 the scene was dominated by a new type of Resistance activists, seldom seen during earlier periods. Many of them had previously been in the labor service or in prison. Most of them had been born in Hungary, and were intimately familiar with the language and with the Magyar mentality. The many refugees who occupied leadership positions in the various movements continued to cooperate, but for the most part they remained behind the scenes. Most of the testimony regarding this period attests that the ability to establish trustworthy contacts and to create confidence were most important in assuring successful operations. Typical examples are to be found in Kepes' testimony:

> One of the most disconcerting positions I ever found myself in was a result of the name given to me when I got my first Aryan papers, László Koltay. One day one of our veteran workers, Géza Szamosi, came to Komoly in a panic, reporting that his father had been taken

to the Hungarian Gestapo in the Swabian mountain. Komoly got hold of me and said: 'Laci, take a car and try to do something.' I went through three different offices before I got to the right man, the well known László Koltay. I introduced myself by the same name, and he at once asked which branch of the Koltay family I came from.

I explained that my previous name had been Kugelhüber, and as a matter of fact I came from a family of Swabians [ethnic Germans—A.C.] . . . . I told him it was very unpleasant for me to deal with these problems of Jews, but a duty is a duty. In the end I got Szamosi's father out and took him back in the car with me . . . . This acquaintanceship with Koltay later turned out to be very helpful. I had someone to turn to, and most important someone I could always rely on. I went to him a number of times; sometimes I succeeded, and sometimes not. Koltay was a vile person, brutal and despicable. I always spoke to him in the tone of two Magyar gentlemen talking among themselves . . . .

There were also less formal ways of striking up important acquaintanceships. A woman once introduced me to a non-Jewish physician who had formerly been an admirer of Imrédy. He had become disappointed with the regime, and now hated his former friends. He was of great help to me because he was familiar with the political machinery from within. He knew exactly who to turn to in every case, who possessed the necessary authority, and who could give any order required. As a rule, I never had to go to the person concerned. I simply used his name as authority, because I knew exactly who had the power to decide. These were usually men of second or third echelons, but still quite important, so that those carrying out the orders would not dare go to ask if they had indeed issued the commands which I had ascribed to them. Those were complex times, and the most important thing was to create a good and convinving impression . . . . During all this time, until Christmas, I was not called upon to show my papers even once. It was sufficient that I said I was so and so, and they took my word for it.[23]

As a result of its widespread rescue activities, the Resistance became, after October 15, the most important element in the life of the Jews in

the Hungarian capital, and the address for every need. The Resistance workers knew how to adapt themselves to all conditions, and to operate accordingly, so that they were almost oblivious of the never-ending dangers which lurked about each activity. Although not every operation was crowned with complete success, so far as is known no harm came to any of the Resistance members themselves during October and November.

CHAPTER 14

THE END COMES

By mid-November, the situation in the Hungarian capital had deteriorated to the point of utter anarchy. The city was cut off on all sides, except for the highway leading westward, toward the Reich. Roads and rail lines were at the full disposal of the military—to the extent that the constant bombardment made their use possible. The Red Army was approaching from the south and from the east, and the sound of the Soviet artillery could be clearly heard in the suburbs. The city itself was subjected to perpetual bombing and shelling, and from early December on most of the population practically lived in shelters. There was no one to repair the power and telephone lines or the water and gas pipelines which had been damaged by the air raids or by sabotage from within. No food was to be had, and the only meat available was that of the horses which had been hit in the bombing and had died in the streets.

There was only faint hope that the Germans would not try to wage a house-to-house fight in Budapest, but even this hope was quickly dissipated. Szálasi took the trouble to visit Hitler's headquarters on December 4, at which time it was made absolutely clear and final that the Germans would fight stubbornly within the city.

Early in November, the population was requested to leave the city voluntarily, until its "reliberation." Many did leave, primarily because of the atrocity stories which were being spread about conditions under

Soviet occupation, or because of fear of retribution for their role in the Fascist regime. The voluntary exodus was handicapped considerably because of the critical shortage of means of transport which were, first and foremost, placed at the disposal of the organized exodus. The latter included not only the disassembling and shipment westward of industrial plants, but also the transfer of art treasures, bank reserves, the Crown, which served as symbol of the state's independence, and the whole mechanism of government, including members of Parliament and the leadership of the Arrow Cross Party. Where it was found impossible to remove manufacturing facilities of any strategic value, the instructions were to blow them up and destroy them completely.

As a result of this evacuation policy, the city was left under the unlimited control of Arrow Cross functionaries of third and fourth rank, who were not considered important enough to send to the West. Thus the Arrow Cross "commander" of the city was Imre Nidósi, who just a few months earlier had been a pedicurist at one of Budapest's large bathhouses. Another notorious character, typical of the times, was Father András Kún, who imposed his terror on the city while wearing his priestly robe, pistol strapped to his side, and carrying a submachine gun. On his arm was the insignia stripe of the Arrow Cross. He was backed up by a gang of Arrow Cross thugs and killers.[1]

The process of administrative disorganization had already begun with Szálasi's rise to power, but in the earlier stages there were still persons, both on the government and party level, with whom it was possible to talk, at least through the neutral legations, and with whom some sort of agreement could be reached. With the passage of time, anarchy began to set in, reaching its peak with the encirclement of the city. Killings on the streets became a common occurrence. Thousands of Jews were taken to the banks of the Danube, which became a site for mass murder. Protective passes and the protected houses no longer had any value, and at times it appeared that the Arrow Cross gangs even singled out the "protected" Jews for their fury, leaving the other Jews to starve in the congested ghetto which was suffering from illness, vermin, and the bombings.

The disintegration which overtook the city obviously affected the work of the Resistance. The various centers of activity, which had always enjoyed one form or another of legal status, found it increasingly difficult to operate, and by the beginning of January 1945, they had to be closed

down completely. The thousands who had taken up refuge in the offices of the Swiss legation, and the children who were supposed to be under the protection of the Red Cross, gradually lost their solid foundation of support.

The greatest danger facing any underground movement is that of infiltration of a hostile element into its ranks, or capture of one of its members. The nature of the Zionist movements, their common language and patterns of behavior, as well as the closely knit relationships among the members made infiltration by an *agent provocateur* extremely unlikely. The arrest of an activist, however, was always a realistic possibility and most of the members of the Resistance had some experience in this, either when they themselves had been apprehended, or when they sought to free their comrades. No one could be certain that he would be able to withstand all the cruel tortures of an interrogation. Any information extracted from a Resistance member could be fatal to the entire movement. Apparently this is what happened, leading to the arrest of dozens of members of the Resistance, particularly of *Dror-Habonim*—including most of its leadership—in the final month of Nazi rule.

The great shortcoming of the structural pattern of the Halutz Resistance, composed as it was of youth movements, was the fact that most of the activists knew each other and knew many intimate details about their immediate comrades as well as about other members of the Resistance. This was especially true of the members who usually appeared in Arrow Cross uniforms, and carried on their activity independently. They were not only familiar with all their comrades, but also maintained an almost daily contact with them. They were also familiar with all the bunkers, for they were the ones who served as liaison between members of the movement.

Around the fifth or sixth of December two members of *Dror* were stopped as they left the Red Cross office at 52 Baross Street, where the movement's headquarters was located. That was where Neshka Goldfarb distributed the documents for the activists. Communication and supplies for the bunkers were administered from there. In fact, this was the nerve center not only for *Dror-Habonim,* but also for *Hashomer Hatzair,* and to an extent also for *Maccabi Hatzair,* three movements which at that time were working very closely together. One of the two young men managed to get away, but fears mounted in the Resistance that the second, known as

Patyu, had broken under interrogation and had begun to reveal information to the police. A few days later a stranger entered the office on Baross Street looking for Mr. Neshka. It is possible that the occurrence had nothing to do with the arrest, but it served to alert the staff, and most of the Resistance members immediately left the office. Their prompt departure very likely reduced the number of victims, but several members were arrested that very day as they left the building.

Zvi Goldfarb and Jenő Dijósi were arrested about this time. No direct connection was ever found between these arrests and the previous detention of Patyu, but when the two were in the police car it became clear to them that the officers had very accurate information about the *Dror* members in the Resistance, and they asked for Zvi by name, as one of the leaders of the Resistance. As noted earlier, he has been one of the first refugees to reach Hungary from Poland, and in the course of time had become the most outstanding leader of the *Dror* movement. During this period he carried Aryan documents in the name of Mario Marquisi from Italy, though he did not know a word of Italian. Zvi invited the police to lunch, and they accepted his generous invitation. He could afford to do so because in his bag, in addition to a considerable number of Aryan documents, he had a large sum of money. In the meantime Dijósi managed to get away, to report Zvi's arrest, and to warn the staff at Baross Street. At the restaurant Zvi succeeded in convincing the policemen that it was worth their while to take the money he had, and let him "run." The police accepted the suggestion, and half an hour later he reappeared at Baross Street, a free man.

But now it was obvious that the police had a great deal of information about the members of the Resistance, but it was not clear what the source of the information was, nor how detailed. There was also suspicion that a Jew who had several times received papers from Neshka had been the one who informed the police, rather than Paytu. Genuine evidence was lacking.

The day following the first arrests, Neshka, Zvi, and Willy Eisikovits were to meet at a predetermined time and place. Neshka was arrested the moment she arrived. From afar Zvi saw what had happened, decided to leave, and boarded a trolley, but then decided that he ought to follow so as to find out where Neshka was being taken, and then seek to get her out. Willy was on a motorcycle, and Zvi leaped onto the seat behind him.

However, they could not get the motorcycle started, and both of them fell into the hands of the detectives who had surrounded the area.

Asher Arányi, one of the contact men with the movement's bunkers, was arrested on December 8. The police now had fifteen comrades in custody. All of them were put in the Margit Avenue prison and subjected to torture. Copies of the bulletin published at the bunker in Hűvösvölgy were found on Neshka, as well as documents, including stamped *Schutzpässe* without names. Despite the torture they refused to confess that they belonged to the Resistance. In the same prison were members of the Communist resistance, among them many Jews, some of whom had been there for three or four years. In this mixed company was also a girl who belonged to *Betar,* and she took care of Neshka, whose cell she shared.[2]

Under these circumstances, when it became clear that all the groups operating in the open had drawn the attention of the rampaging Fascists, only the bunkers appeared to be relatively secure. Very quickly this turned out to be still another illusion. A few days after the arrest of Zvi, Neshka, and Willy, it was the turn of the bunkers. The first was that at Hűvösvölgy. In her testimony Hedva Szántó told of the events leading up to the police raid there:

> As I was going out of the bunker I saw Asher Arányi. Just as I was ready to go over to him I saw two men in civilian dress pounced on him and arrest him and a girl who was with him . . . . I knew, from a previous meeting with Asher, that Zvi, Neshka and Willy had been arrested. We were certain that they would never talk . . . . When I returned to the bunker I reported that Asher Arányi had been picked up before my very eyes, and I suggested that we scatter, but they all maintained that he would never spill any information, and so we remained. The gendarmes appeared the following day . . . . They took us to Margit Avenue, and of course we were sure they would kill us at once. We didn't know what awaited us.[3]

The bunker at Hungária Avenue, which was commanded by Eli Shlomovitz (Shalev), was next in line, and was uncovered a few days later. Eli Shalev testifed about the arrest:

> Marci was on guard when we were attacked. He opened fire on the police and wounded two of them, but was hit by a volley and killed. When we came out, one of the girls approached him and kissed him. This was on December 16, 1944, about eight days after Neshka and Zvi had been arrested and the first bunker at Hűvösvölgy destroyed. They took us to Margit Avenue. The officer who interrogated us said that Zvi, Neshka, Willy, and Asher were no longer alive. We knew that the Red Army was very close, and despite the torture we hoped to prolong the interrogation. In prison we met many Jewish Communists who had been held there since 1941. During the questioning we had no idea what had happened to the other fellows.[4]

The new prisoners did not meet those who had been seized earlier because the latter had already been taken to Sopronkőhida, on the western side of the country, for further questioning. Most of the national agencies had already left Budapest, and the government itself had set up its seat in the city of Sopron. This period in prison in western Hungary was described by Zvi Goldfarb in his testimony:

> One day the Hungarians took all the important political prisoners out of the jail and transferred them quite a distance to the prison at Sopron, near the Austrian border. . . . When I was taken to my cell after "interrogation," and my chains removed, I was all beaten up, badly wounded, and bleeding. They half carried, half dragged me into the cell. The treatment was not repeated the next day. They realized that if they continued to treat me that way they would finish me off entirely, and they didn't want to do that yet. . . .
>
> Two days later the three of us, Neshka, Willy and I, were put in a closed car and with a Hungarian and Gestapo guard were taken back to the capital. . . . The next day the city was already closed off by the Russians, and en route our escorts were afraid that they would not be in time to get into the city. If we couldn't get in, it was clear that would be the end for us. However, we did manage to make it, and we were returned to the prison.[5]

It must be noted that the Hungarian leader Bajcsy-Zsilinsky, was sent to Sopron at the same time as Zvi Goldfarb and his associates. Also of

interest is the fact that on December 24, the very day on which the Hungarian resistance leader was condemned and executed, the members of the Halutz Resistance were returned to Budapest in great haste, as if to arrive before the encirclement of the city. It seems surprising that the Arrow Cross authorities put such great effort into the handling of the Halutzim in their custody, at a time when they were holding many high-ranking politicians and senior army officers. Possibly the authorities attached an exaggerated importance to the Halutzim. There is no logical explanation for these movements of the prisoners, but because of the strange concurrence of dates, it is possible that the Halutzim were taken to Sopron so as to play some role in the big trial. When it was found that they were not required, their presence there became superfluous, and they were returned to the capital. On the other hand, this could be just another example of the general confusion and lack of logic which were prevalent in the Arrow Cross Party.

At this point, disaster struck the staff of the laboratory which was then composed of three members, Micky Langer, Avraham Feigenbaum (Feigi), and David Gur (Grosz). They had been seeking a place where in relative security, they could continue to produce their papers. The group was small, but the documents they turned out provided the basis for existence of a vast population of Jews and non-Jews. The laboratory was not the only source of documents, but the laboratory was able to produce a variety of documents.

After an interruption in their work of about two weeks, the laboratory staff at last found a place which they felt was suitable for their purposes. It was a rear office in the construction department of the Budapest municipality, but only a few hours after they entered the place they were arrested. There was apparently no connection between their detention and the wave of arrests which began at Baross Street. Testimonies indicate that the cause was local informing, or perhaps simply blind chance.

The chain of arrests of the *Dror* members and the staff of the laboratory struck a heavy blow at the Resistance's centers of activity, but those who were still at large were spurred on to even greater efforts. In the meantime, Micky Langer, of the laboratory, died during "questioning." The attempts to get the comrades out were described by Rafi Benshalom: (Parenthesis in the original.)

> During those stormy December days it was extremely difficult to ascertain where the prisoners were being held. It was not until several days later that we learned that the whole bunch from *Dror* were locked up at Margit Avenue . . . . Then, like a bolt out of the blue, we were struck by a new blow. Our workshop had to find a new place. David, Feigi, and Micky never came back from that move. As a precautionary measure, no one knew where they were moving from, or to what new place, and as a result we had no clue to begin with. . . . Restraining our fury, we went over every possibility for rescuing them. We knew for sure that every hour lost might mean their death. At that moment the Pole who had several times come to us claiming that he could get prisoners out turned up at Sándor Wekerle Street. On the one hand his prices were hair-raising (one hundred Napoleon gold coins for each prisoner), and on the other hand he did not stimulate very great confidence. This time, however, we had no choice, and he accepted the mission. . . . The affair took four days. On the fourth day a group of exhausted and beaten up prisoners, far more than anticipated, suddenly appeared at 17 Sándor Wekerle Street. We willingly paid 500 Napoleons for them. It took some time until we could get the money together, and only then could we hug our comrades. . . . The next day the same man brought about the release of over a hundred prisoners from Margit Avenue. Among them were 65 members of *Dror;* the remainder were for the most part Communists, many of whom we knew.[6]

What facilitated this mass release was chiefly that most of them, who had been arrested under various conditions and by different elements, were all concentrated in one prison. The Polish contact simply bribed the Hungarian officer who had the list of those who were supposed to be transferred to another prison. The prisoners themselves testified later that they took particular note that the names on that list were not identical with the names of those registered in the prison. In many cases these were assumed names, used by the Resistance members and known only to a few people on the outside. In other cases, they were Hebrew names commonly used by the members of the Zionist movements. This fact

alone should have aroused suspicion on the part of the prison authorities, but they never thought of checking the lists, just as they never bothered to check exactly who had sent the officer to remove them.

It was the good fortune of the Resistance that the general administrtive collapse reached its peak at this time, toward the end of December. Most of the prison management fled to the West, and the jailers who were left did not know or did not care what happened to the prisoners. More than anything else, they did not want to be found within the prison when the Russians entered the city. Thus, with the same casual ease with which thousands of Jews were killed along the banks of the Danube, many others were simply released from the prisons.

The release of Zvi Zeidenfeld, known as Zidi, a *Bnai Akiva* member, was no less typical of the period. He had been arrested by the Gestapo at the end of November, when they already knew not only about the existence of the Resistance but also about its activities under Red Cross cover. This turned to his advantage, for if he had been simply another Jew using Aryan papers, he would have been killed without any delay, or at best would have been sent to a camp in Germany. In this case they preferred to use him to reach other people in the Resistance to find the source of the documents.

By the time the members at Vadász Street heard about Zidi's arrest he was already in the hospital after the first stage of the interrogation. Two men were sent to the temporary hospital at Wesselényi Street to try to get their comrade out. To reduce risk, it was decided to carry out the deed at night. The two Halutzim wore SS officer uniforms, but lacked suitable documents. On their way they ran into a two-man German SS patrol. They had two possibilities—to fall into the hands of the Gestapo, or to do away with the Germans on the spot. They chose the latter alternative. Gunshots on the streets of Budapest in the middle of the night no longer attracted any attention, but the corpses of two SS men was not a common sight. It must be added that the Resistance activists sought to avoid incidents of this kind wherever possible, for fear of endangering the whole set-up.

A Jew was on guard at the entrance to the hospital, but he was afraid to release Zidi without an order from his superiors. Since there was obviously no intention of asking for such permission, the Jewish guard was taken together with Zidi to the Glass House. The odd part of this story

was revealed only when it was all over. Despite the cruel interrogation, when Zidi was released he still had in his possession the bag with all the false papers.[7]

One day before the siege of Budapest was made complete, Eichmann and members of his staff, as well as the Minister of the Interior in the Arrow Cross government, Gábor Vajna, left the city. On that very day Vajna issued a warning to all the Jews in hiding, "according to his information, many in number," to proceed to the ghetto within 24 hours. A special postponement until December 31 was granted only to the children's homes under the protection of the Red Cross, and to two temporary hospitals which were outside the ghetto.[8] The order also reaffirmed the existence of the "international ghetto," on condition that the population there did not exceed the quotas established. This was the last attempt by the Arrow Cross government to provide a so-called legal framework for its policy toward the Jews in the capital. As has already been noted, even before 24 hours had elapsed, an Arrow Cross unit was already evacuating the children's homes.

The departure of the senior officials exposed the Jews of Budapest to the arbitrary actions of people like Imre Nidósi and Father Kún. The Jews who bore Aryan documents were relatively secure, if it is possible to speak of security under the existing conditions, whereas the official centers, whose presence was much more obvious, were more vulnerable. Most conspicuous was the Representation of Foreign Interests at Vadász Street.

The building there, besides being a huge "bunker," was the operational base for rescue and relief activities, and the clearinghouse for all reports submitted by the activists. The fact that the water supply and the telephone lines to the Glass House were not severed was certainly a miracle, perhaps to be ascribed to the general total anarchy. Even after additional facilities were opened up at Wekerle Street, and at the adjoining building, the structure on Vadász Street still provided shelter for 3000 people. Mihály Salamon, one of the directors of the building, described the situation there:

> The group under the command of the infamous Father Kún carried out the most horrible deeds of all. He was responsible also for the raid on Vadász Street. . . . We knew in advance of their intentions.

> Our Halutzim, who operated on the outside as Arrow Cross members, as railroad workers or as firemen, and our young people who at great risk went about wearing various uniforms, all warned us to be perpetually vigilant, because danger was approaching. The building on Vadász Street had for months been a bone in the throat for them, both because of the bluff of "extraterritorialism," and because of the mass distribution of *Schutzpässe*, the scope of which they knew almost exactly. Up to then their intentions had been foiled. Now these blackguards were driven by another incentive—hunger. They expected to find a large stock of food at Vadász Street.[9]

The house was forcibly entered on Sunday, December 31, Gendarmes and Arrow Cross ruffians broke in, and took all the people out onto the street, amidst blows and shots, as a result of which three people were killed. One of these was the mother of a young rabbi, Dr. Alexander (Sándor) Scheiber, who had arrived there that very day because her son believed she would be safer there. Emergency phone calls were made to anyone who could be reached.[10] The men at Wekerle Street were summoned to help, and Moshe Krausz sought to use his contacts from the consulate in Szabadság Square. An Arrow Cross unit from the Fifth District, in which the house was located, was also called upon to help. This unit had for weeks been bribed with money, food, and drink. The unit did indeed come to the building, but its intervention was not helpful. In the end, the contacts produced results. At the last moment, when all the people from the house were being lined up to march away, orders were received from an appropriate source, and the attackers returned the people into the "legation." Not so lucky were those who two days earlier had been removed from protected houses, and taken straight to the Danube. Nothing could be done to prevent it then.

While this drama was being enacted at 29 Vadász Street, and the people were lined up, hands in the air, in a desperate situation, the neighboring building, at No. 31, the former headquarters of the Football Association, remained untouched. Alexander (Sándor) Nathan, who was in charge there, reported on those moments:

> When we saw them taking the Jews out of the house next door, shooting and throwing grenades, we understood that our time

> had come. . . . We had members of the Halutz movements in our building, and we possessed about 50 or 60 rifles and a considerable number of grenades. . . . The decision was mine to take, whether and when to burst out and attack the Fascists. I felt we should still wait. In the meantime about 1500-1600 people had been taken out. We knew that their next stop would be the Danube. They would all be killed, just as thousands of other Jews had been. . . . But our people in the Swiss legation succeeded in getting some police, and the German commander intervened personally. . . . The Jews who were about to be marched off to the Danube were returned to the building. . . . If I had made a hasty decision to burst out, we would have caused a catastrophe. . . . We could have become heroes in a twinkling, like the heroes of Warsaw, but dead heroes. We would have been endangering the lives of thousands of people, and perhaps even the lives of the 70,000 Jews in the ghetto.[11]

. The day after the assault, a much smaller Arrow Cross group returned to the place. This time they spoke in a friendly manner. They requested food, and asked to have a short talk with Arthur Weiss, who had directed the rescue activity against them the previous day. Weiss agreed to accompany them, but he never returned. This was the killers' revenge for their failure. Four days later one of the leaders of *Hashomer Hatzair,* Simha Hunwald, was taken when, according to Mihály Salomon, he went out to search for Weiss. He was seized at the entrance to the Glass House and was killed in prison.

These two victims of an episode in which the lives of about 3000 Jews were saved symbolized the unique organization at Vadász Street, where there was an involuntary fusion of disparate attitudes, personalities, and generations. To the local Fascists there was no difference between the leftist Halutz rebel and the wealthy industrialist. Both were Jews who sought to save their own lives, and to rescue other Jews as well.

Toward the end of December, the general process of deterioration began to affect Department A of the International Red Cross, headed by Ottó Komoly. From the outset the various sections, such as supply, child-guidance, and staff had operated independently. Each movement also displayed its own initiative in setting up children's homes and managing them. Komoly's staff, in the head office, was composed of Resistance members and other local people, including a Christian woman,

Ilona, who was of immense help in rescuing Resistance people who got into difficulties. She is mentioned appreciatively in several testimonies.

After the Arrow Cross attack on the children's home on Munkácsi Street at the end of December, Komoly began to fear for the fate of his office, which was on the same street. To begin with, he forbade his staff from sleeping in the building. Later he severely restricted the office activity. During the last days of December he scattered his staff, but his personal secretary, Joseph Sheffer, of *Maccabi Hatzair,* remained in daily touch with him. Komoly himself took up residence at the Hotel Ritz, believing he would be relatively secure there. However, on the same day that Arthur Weiss was taken from Vadász Street, Komoly was arrested in the hotel, was taken away, and never heard from again.[12] All the efforts by the legations and by the Resistance people to procure the release of Komoly and Weiss were of no avail. So far as is known, he was killed by the Arrow Cross in Nidósi's headquarters a day or two after his arrest.

Organized activity of the Resistance ceased about the beginning of January 1945. Most of the activists tried to keep out of sight, and awaited the Red Army, which was already engaged in house-to-house fighting within the City. Movement in the streets became impossible. Komoly's office closed down completely after his arrest, and his staff was told to go underground.

The major problem now was to find some place to spend the last few days quietly before the liberation. Most of the scattered exploits were of an individual nature. For example, Joseph Sheffer succeeded in "purchasing" a truckload of food which was diverted to one of the children's homes. The shipment very likely saved those youngsters from starvation.[13] In every case the vital factors were resourcefulness, quick reaction, daring, and a considerable degree of luck.

Another individual achievement was that of David (Coca) Grünwald, who decided to set up a "hospital" in which people could be hidden. The tale is amazing in its uniqueness, and could have occurred only during those crazy times. Coca succeeded in selling his idea for a special Hungarian-style hospital for Arrow Cross personnel, to no less than the pedicurist Nidósi himself. Coca received credentials signed by Nidósi, authorizing him to confiscate both a place and equipment for the hospital, as he saw fit.[14] Accordingly, a cinema was taken over, and beds were brought from some boarding house, but there was no doctor. They managed to

confine there a number of people who had no better place in which to hide. Strange to relate, the hospital continued to function right up to the liberation.

One of the things that no one thought through was how to get by the critical moment when control passed from one army to the other. For example, many of the Resistance people wore uniforms which were enough to endanger their lives when the Red Army entered.

This chapter may best be concluded with a description of the moment of liberation, as narrated by Joseph Meyer:

> We heard the thunder of the artillery, and the echo of the firing, but we had already become accustomed to that. . . . We wore uniforms of the Hungarian military gendarmerie, and had hats decorated with rooster feathers. We left the house and began to cross the street when suddenly we heard a shout, "*Stoy*!" Before us were soldiers wearing fur hats, with a red star on them. It appears that an advance unit of the Soviet Army had penetrated to a few dozen meters from where we were.
>
> During the first few seconds of this moment, we did not realize our situation. We burst out with shouts of joy, and ran toward them with our arms outstretched, to embrace them. To us they were the liberators. They drew back a bit, and aimed their weapons at us. Only then did we wake up to the reality that in their eyes we were the enemy. I think that I was never closer to death throughout the entire Holocaust than I was during those seconds. To this day, I don't know how we managed to convince them to take us to their headquarters, instead of killing us. There a discussion ensued between a slant-eyed Mongolian and a young Jewish officer who spoke Yiddish . . . .[15]

A few days later, on January 17, liberation came to the ghetto and to the entire east bank on which almost all the surviving Jews of Budapest were concentrated.

CHAPTER 15

IN LIEU OF A SUMMARY

The Resistance chapter of the Halutz movements in Hungary came to an end on January 18, 1945. A true summing up can take place only after a very thorough and intensive study of the character and leadership of Hungarian Jewry after 1945, but such research has not yet been done, and information is still scanty. The liberation of the ghetto and the eastern part of the city also marked the beginning of a new chapter, characterized by free and open activity of the Halutz movements, and the emergence of the Zionist movement in Hungary not only as a major factor in community life, but also as one of the most dynamic Zionist organizations in all of Europe. This transformation was a result of the far-reaching consequences of the Holocaust, of course, but within the internal context of Hungarian Jewry, it was also a result of the activities of the Halutz Resistance.

Hungarian Jewry after 1945 was quite different from that which had existed before the war. Between the two wars, and even up to 1944, the majority of the Hungarians had considered themselves a denominational group only; in nationality they felt themselves an inseparable part of the Hungarian nation. The only ones whose attitude deviated from this were the members of the Zionist movements, but they had no

influence whatever in the life of the community. The conception by Hungarian Jews that they were one hundred percent Hungarians was not accepted by the majority of the Hungarian people, and was contrary to the expressed policy of the government. Furthermore, this view was in direct contradiction, especially during the war, to all the measures which in one way or another Nazi Germany imposed on Europe. The arrival of Jewish refugees in Hungary, from the beginning of 1942 on, served in ever increasing measure as material illustration of the great gap between Jewish self-identification and the political realities.

This contradiction between the outlook of most of the Jews, and the domestic sociopolitical reality was translated by the Halutz refugees, during a two-year period, into organizational forms. The concentration of the Halutz movements on the refugee problem during 1942-1944 provided them with a unique collective experience. This was not merely a one-way influence, in which the refugees brought information and succeeded in convincing certain limited circles of the veracity of their reports. The process was two-way. Thanks to the relatively long stay of the refugees in the more or less tranquil atmosphere which prevailed in Hungary during those two years, they became absorbed into the local movements, which thereupon became an amalgam. The refugees became familiar with their surroundings, and were integrated into the ranks of the local youth. The newcomers never lost their own special identity, and were constantly aware of their own specific problems, but an effective ideological and organizational cooperation developed between them and the local Zionist youth.

The German occupation caught Hungarian Jews mentally unprepared and politically unorganized for what ensued. The Jewish Council, created out of the existing community leadership, was a leadership in name only, completely lacking in initiative and in any ability to save lives. During the first weeks of the occupation, when the Hungarian authorities easily succeeded in severing all connection between most of the Jews of the provincial towns, and the Jewish Council in the capital, the Council had not the faintest conception of the enormity of this calamity, and did little to circumvent it.

The Halutz movements, on the other hand, were able to operate even under the conditions created by the occupation. It is irrelevant that the warnings sounded by the refugees appeared unrealistic in the Hungary

of Kállay. What is of consequence is that these warnings became very real with the appearance of Eichmann. The influence of the refugees during the two years preceding the occupation was directly responsible for laying the foundations of the Resistance. The Halutz Resistance was the only organized element which succeeded in maintaining live contact with the provincial towns. To be sure, these contacts were limited in scope, in accordance with the size and power of the movements, but they achieved two important goals. They opened a small crevice through which information was passed regarding the isolated provincial towns, and secondly, they did rescue hundreds of people. In so doing they set up an organizational framework and refined the technical methods of resistance operation.

To begin with, the principal aim of the Resistance was to rescue their own people and their immediate families, and the organizational system was established for this purpose. At a very early stage, however, the pressure of events exerted a dynamism of its own, and in carrying out the *tiyul,* the Halutzim found themselves involved in rescue activities which went far beyond the limited scope of their own movements. All these activities still affected only marginal elements in the population, but no rescue effort can be dismissed as unimportant. The *tiyul* to Romania succeeded in saving some 7000 Jews. By what yardstick can anyone determine if this figure is high or low? These activities did not project the Resistance into any prominent position in the community, however. From this narrow point of view their limited activities were carried out on the margins of the formal and public Jewish organizations, and in the shadow of reputable and better known Zionists like Komoly, Kasztner, and Krausz.

The Story of the Halutz Resistance began in effect early in 1942, when a few dozen young people turned their efforts to rescuing several hundred Halutz refugees from Slovakia and Poland. The story continued in the early spring of 1944, when the major efforts were directed to rescuing local comrades. By summer the rescue operations almost spontaneously transcended the narrow limitations of the movements. During the Szálasi regime the Resistance was engaged in an extensive rescue operation, comprehensive in character, and marked by achievement unprecedented during the Holocaust.

The change in the nature and purpose of the Resistance's activities was not quantitative alone. The Zionist movement in Hungary gradually assumed the functions of an all-embracing Jewish leadership. The rescue

efforts of Kasztner and Brand at the beginning of the occupation, Krausz's activities during the establishment of the office for the Representation of Foreign Interests at Vadász Street, and the work of the Resistance after October were all links in the same chain, an instinctive reaction of the national will to survive during the declining days of Nazism in Europe. The operations of the Resistance were the most comprehensive and the most effective of them all.

The expansion and intensification of the Resistance program may be explained on three different levels. The first was organizational in nature, utilizing the existing apparatus of the movements, and later exploiting the accumulated experience for a widening of the program. The second was biological, due to the youth of the members. The third level was ideological—the members felt themselves to be exponents of the Zionist movement.

The organizational aspect found expression primarily in the ability to carry out coordinated exploits, and thereafter in the proficiency both in producing Aryan documents and in using them effectively. The creation of a "surplus" naturally brought in its wake the search for new "markets." In this case it served as a stimulus to distribute the papers in ever widening circles, including other local resistance movements. Essentially, the creation of documents was a means which enabled the members not only to assure their own survival but also to rescue others. Those members who successfully assumed Aryan identities were the ones who removed their comrades from the Jewish houses, gathered up the children, established the children's homes, and maintained them. They were the most dynamic element in the Resistance; they provided stimulus to others and carried out most of the rescue activities. All this served to heighten the prestige of the local youth in the Resistance, in contrast to the early days when the refugees were more prominent.

Youth is a typical characteristic of every resistance movement. The age element was of special significance in Hungary after October because of the nature of the deeds that had to be carried out. The Arrow Cross government was to a large extent in the hands of young men, and the gangs which controlled the streets were often composed of youngsters. This constituted a special challenge for the Resistance, and in many exploits it appeared that the Jewish youth were determined to demonstrate that they were superior to the Fascists. Many feats required initiative,

mobility, and willingness to take risks. If the Resistance members had been more mature and more established, they would not have been so inclined to take those risks. The readiness to undertake general rescue operations emerged at this time, after the earlier stages of Resistance activity, but were not necessarily a result thereof. The comprehensive rescue work was not a result of any advance planning, nor did it develop out of any foresight on the part of the Halutzim. It occurred quite suddenly, and only in retrospect did the inner logic and the natural compulsion of these events become clear.

The most important and most decisive level was the ideological. Members of the youth movements felt that they were carrying out a national mission. Somewhat of an elitist note is to be found in their views, and it is expressed also in the memoirs and in the testimonies published after the war. This dictated a certain sequence in their activities, although it is doubtful if they were aware of it at the time. During the earlier stage their rescue work concentrated on their own members. During the period of the *tiyul,* the Resistance also included young people who were not necessarily members of their movements. After October much of the effort was concentrated on saving children. These were not chance priorities, but resulted from the ideological background of the Zionist Resistance.

The stimulus for establishment of children's homes undoubtedly grew out of a desire to assure continuity of the Zionist movement in Hungary. This view had been expressed previously in Hungary and in the Zionist movement in Palestine early in 1944, before the storm, when many believed that the Jews of Hungary had already been saved. Since many of the activists voiced this explanation in their testimony after the war, it is reasonable to assume that this motive did influence the nature of the activities during the period under review.

This is not to say that the members of the Halutz Resistance and the Zionist activists were the only ones who rescued Jews. Hundreds of others, young and old alike, also risked their lives in rescue operations. In many instances they were able to reduce the extent of the slaughter to a degree. Many persons who had previously had no connection whatever with the Resistance, also took part in many resistance activities. However, the Halutz Resistance was the only systematically organized body which operated on a broad scale and in various areas. The result was that many people, both Zionists and non-Zionists, saw in its success a confirmation of the program and philosophy of Zionism as a national movement.

Even before October, Komoly recorded in his diary that because Zionists were the only ones doing something to save lives, a change had taken place in the attitude of Hungarian Jews toward Zionism. After October the activity of the Zionists, and especially of the Halutz Resistance, was even more conspicuous. In the ghettos of Poland there were many who regarded the Halutz youth movements as an alternative leadership to that of the *Judenrat.* In Budapest, during the final months, the youth movements were in effect almost the sole source of leadership. Whereas in Poland such a situation had its roots in the prewar community, in Hungary such a change was totally unexpected.

It is impossible to arrive at any precise estimate as to how many lives were saved by the Resistance. The only area in which it is perhaps possible to make a reasonably accurate quantitative appraisal is with regard to the children's homes. On every other level, any estimate must necessarily be based on unreliable sources, and as a consequence would be lacking in any historical significance.

The estimate that about 100,000 protected passes were produced is based on the testimony of the persons who made them. Some of the passes were given to the same people more than once. In many cases people carried a different set of documents in each pocket. Many of the passes were not utilized. Others, especially those dispatched to the labor service units which were bound westward, never reached their destinations. On the other hand, many of the Jews who were deported to Gemany after October 15 possessed protective passes of one kind or another, some of them false and some genuine, yet their papers did not save them. It is clear therefore, that the number of documents produced is not a reliable indication of the number of persons rescued. There can be no doubt that protective papers, most of them produced and distributed by the Halutz Resistance, did save the lives of tens of thousands of Jews. A more accurate estimate is impossible.

It is even more difficult to estimate how many people were saved thanks to the food supplied by the Resistance. Are these already included in the count of those saved because of their protective passes, or should they be counted separately? No one can arrive at a count of the number of persons saved in the streets of Budapest after October 15, and how many were murdered thereafter by one or another of the Arrow Cross gangs. All these questions end in an impasse.

There is no doubt whatever that in scope and effectiveness, the rescue operations of the Halutz movements stood out in sharp contrast to the ineffectiveness of the traditional community leadership. Furthermore, the daring displayed by the youth was particularly conspicuous against the background of the hostility displayed by most of the local population. These contrasts gradually led the way for the Resistance youth to assume powerful positions of leadership without precedent in Hungary. By the time of the liberation they were the only organized force in the Jewish community. For the first time in Hungarian history the center of gravity for Hungarian Jewry shifted from identification with the Hungarian nation, to Jewish national identification.

The Jewish public, disappointed with the attitude of the general population during the persecutions, became increasingly disillusioned because of the new waves of violent anti-Semitism which began in 1945, this time in the guise of class distinction. In the ensuing years, and for a short time until the liquidation of the Zionist movement by the Communist regime, Zionism in Hungary achieved unprecedented success. Zionist activists, young adults, and youth merging into adulthood occupied key positions in every Jewish institution. There was not a Jewish organization not influenced by the new Zionist spirit blowing through assimilated Hungarian Jewry. Former Resistance members became the educators of the new Jewish generation. People who had worked at Vadász and Wekerle Streets during the siege, planning a new program of Jewish and Zionist education, were the very ones who headed that program of education after the liberation. Those who had set up the children's homes and organized the food supplies were the ones who directed a new network of homes for children, youth centers, and technical training workshops. They were the ones through whom the vast funds of the American Joint Distribution Committee were channelled for rehabilitation of the survivors.

The rescue operations during the persecutions and the carnage were not the only achievements of the Halutz Resistance. That success also served as a basis and point of departure for a Jewish national reawakening in Hungary which was abruptly cut off at its very beginnings, and has not yet received the attention it warrants.

NOTES

Notes to Introduction

1. Jenő Lévai, *Szürke könyv* (Gray Book). Budapest: Officina (1946?), p. 210. Lévai was a Jewish journalist and his books published at the end of the 1940s were until recently the widest source of the history of Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust. These books contain no footnotes, and in most cases Lévai does not cite his sources. In numerous cases these works contain errors of fact which in part cannot now be verified. There is no doubt that the abundant material in Lévai's book, written soon after the events, are important sources of information. Nevertheless, for the reasons mentioned above, I have used this source with caution.

2. Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide, The Holocaust in Hungary*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1981, p. 988. This is the most extensive and comprehensive book today on the history of the Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust. Although the two volumes are rich in detailed information based on abundant sources, they lack adequate information on the Halutz Resistance.

3. Rafi Benshalom, *Neevaknu Lemaan Hachaim* (We Struggled for Life). Tel Aviv: Moreshet, 1977, 223p. The book is based on testimonies written in 1945. Zvi Goldfarb, *Ad Kav Haketz* (To the Ultimate Line). Ghetto Fighters' House, 1981. It is based in part on testimonies given to Yad Vashem Archives (hereafter YVSA) 2872/211-G.

4. See Chapter 4. On Hungarian research of Anti-Fascist Resistance, see Chapter 13, particularly Note 9.

5. A series of seven meetings of great importance was initiated by Zvi Goldfarb in 1972-73 in Israel with the participation of many of the central figures of the Halutz Resistance. Recordings of these testimonies are kept in the Ghetto Fighers' House Archives (hereafter—"Ghetto Fighters"). Transcripts are also preserved in "Moreshet Archives—Mordecai Anilevich House" (hereafter—"Moreshet"), A. 665, and in the Center for Historical Documentation—University of Haifa (hereafter—"Center"), H3C59 (hereafter—"leaders' group"). On the attitudes of the Resistance to armed revolt, see Chapter 8.

6. On the Delegation in Istanbul, see Chapter 2, particularly Note 2.

7. The methodological difficulties of research on underground movements were thoroughly analyzed by one of the most experienced historians in the field, Henri Michel, "Rapport général," in *European Resistance Movements,* London: Pergamon Press, 1964, pp. 572-635.

Notes to Chapter 1

1. For important information on Jewish history in Hungary, see C. A. Macartney, *October Fifteenth, A History of Modern Hungary, 1929-1945.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957, 2 vols.; György Ránki, et al., *Magyar történelem* (Hungarian History). Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1976, vols. VII, VIII; Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 1-191; Braham, ed., *Hungarian Jewish Studies.* New York: World Federation of Hungarian Jews, 1966-1969, 3 vols. (cited hereafter as HJS); Nathaniel Katzburg, *Hungary and the Jews.* Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1981, 299p.

2. Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 76-96, Ernő László, "Hungarian Jewry, Demographic Overview, 1918-45," in *HJS,* vol. 2, pp. 137-182.

3. All references here to assimilation and assimilationists are used in the European sense, in which assimilation is the term applied to primary loyalty to the lands in which Jews lived, and attachment to the culture and language of these lands, while at the same time they preserved their identity as Jews by religion. This is in contrast to the present American definition which views assimilation as a complete discarding of Jewish identity and a blending into the dominant society.

On the specific question of Jewish assimilation in Hungary and the various approaches to the problem, see George Barany, "'Magyar Jew or

Jewish Magyar?' Reflection on the Question of Assimilation," Hugh Seton-Watson. "Two Contrasting Policies toward Jews: Russia and Hungary," N. Katzburg, "The Jewish Question in Hungary during the Inter-War Period—Jewish Attitudes," in *Jews and Non Jews in Eastern Europe, 1918-1945.* Bela Vago and George L. Mosse, eds., New York: John Wiley, 1974, pp. 51-124; Bernard Klein, "Hungarian Politics and the Jewish Question in the Inter-War Period," *Jewish Social Studies,* New York, vol. XXXVII, 1966, pp. 79-98; George Schopflin, "Jewish Assimilation in Hungary," and Asher Cohen, "The Attitude of the Intelligentsia in Hungary to Jewish Assimilation," in *Jewish Assimilation in Modern Times.* Bela Vago, ed., Boulder, Col.: East European Monographs, 1981, pp. 57-88.

4. Miklós Lackó, *Arrow-Cross Men, Nationalsocialists, 1935-1944.* Budapest: Akademia, 1968, 112p. Nicholas Nagy-Talavera, *Green Shirts and Others.* Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1970, 227p. Elek Karsai, *Szálasi naplója* (Szálasi's Diary). Budapest: Kossuth, 1978, 492p.

5. Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 122-156, 194-195; Katzburg, pp. 94-185, 262-685.

6. Vilmos Nagybaconi-Nagy, *Végzetes esztendők, 1938-1945* (Fateful Years). Budapest: Körmendy, 1947, 272p.; E. Karsai, *"Fegyvertelenül áltak az aknamezőkön. . . "* ("Unarmed Stood on the Minefields. . ."). Budapest: Magyar Izraeliták Országos Képviselete, 1962, 852p.; R. L. Braham, *The Hungarian Labor Service System 1939-1945,* New York: Columbia University Press, 1977, 159p.; see Note 7, Chapter 2.

7. Hugó Csergő, "Három zsidó nemzedék" (Three Jewish Generations). *OMZsA évkönyv, 1942-1943* (OMZsA Yearbook, 1942-1943). Budapest, 1944, pp. 135-143.

8. Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 84-96.

9. Until 1939, Hungarian Jewry had practically no contact with Jewish organizations in the world. A delegation was sent during that year to Western Europe in order to advance emigration, mainly for Jews of Carpatho-Ruthenia who had no Hungarian citizenship. This was the only Hungarian Jewish activity at the time, on the edge of philanthropic and political action. See: *OMZsA évkönyv, 1943-1944;* N. Katzburg, "The Hungarian Jewish Situation During the Late 1930's," in *Annual of Bar-Ilan University,* Ramat-Gan: Israel, vol. 14-15, pp. 73-99.

10. Ottó Komoly was very active in rescue work after the occupation; see Bela Vago, "Budapest Jewry in the Summer of 1944—Otto Komoly's

Diaries," *Yad Vashem Studies,* Jerusalem, no. 8, 1970, pp. 81-105. The Zionist Organization in Hungary (M.C.Sz.) was, after a long battle, recognized by the government in 1927 and legally permitted to exist. On the parties and their interrelations, see the next chapter.

Notes to Chapter 2

1. There are no exact statistics on refugees who came to Hungary in various periods, but reliable estimates can be used. Official emigration from the Reich from 1933, up to 31 October 1941, was as follows: 4,380 from Germany; 1,310 from Austria; 620 from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia; data based on figures from the *Deutsches Zentralarchiv,* Potsdam. To this, some illegal emigration must be added. Kasztner estimates that 3,000-4,000 Jews came from Germany and Austria, and about 500-1,000 from the Protectorate. See *Der Kastner Bericht.* Ernest Landau, ed., München: Kindler, 1961, p. 45, (cited hereafter–"Kasztner").

2. See Springmann's testimony, YVSA 03/1043. The delegation from Palestine to Istanbul was established in December 1942. The main participants who were in contact with the activists in Hungary were Venya Pomeranz (Professor Zeev Hadari), Menahem Bader, Zeev Shind and for a short period, David Ziment. They were first sent as representatives of the various *kibbutz* movements, but very soon were recognized as delegates of the *Histadrut* (Labor Federation), and later as delegates of the Jewish Agency. As for the Zionists in Hungary, they represented the *Yishuv,* the Jewish population in Palestine. See Menachem Bader, *Shlihuyot Atzuvot* (Sad Expeditions). Merhavia: Sifriat Poalim, 1978, 125p, Dalia Ofer, "The Activities of the Jewish Agency Delegation in Istanbul in 1943," in Israel Gutman, Efraim Zuroff, eds., *Rescue Attempts during the Holocaust,* Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1977, pp. 435-450. The delegation's correspondence was photographed in 1944 and brought to Israel. Original letters or copies can be found in several archives. For the present work, the copy at the Ghetto Fighters' House, which seems to be the most complete, was used. It is marked in the archive Z.1063 (hereafter–"Istanbul"). Some time after the first delegation was established in Istanbul the representative of the Revisionists, Joseph Klarmann and that of Agudat Israel, Jacob Griffel also arrived. These two were not part of the delegation and although their correspondence was not kept, they are often mentioned in testimonies.

3. On the Welfare Bureau's activities, see *OMZsA évkonyv, 1942-43,* pp. 205-216, 1943-44, pp. 184-214; Lévai, *Szürke könyv,* pp. 285-286; *Fekete könyv* (Black Book). Budapest: Officina, n.d., pp. 70-84; Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 87-88; testimonies of Dr. Tibor Koródi, "Center" H3C14/12 and of György Orosz, H3C14/17. One of the refugees, on the help received from the Bureau: Joseph Korniansky, *Beshlihut Halutzim* (As Halutz Emissary). Ghetto Fighters' House, 1979, pp. 119-163. Kasztner writes to Istanbul that he obtained financial help both from the Bureau and from the Head of the Neolog Community, "Istanbul" H255. No data can be found on the number of Jewish refugees from Poland in 1939. The figure of 300 seems to be reasonable, see testimony of Springmann, "Center" H3C21/5. In addition to the Baroness Weiss, the help of the Baroness Szapáry, of Gentile origin, must be mentioned as very effective.

4. On Betar and the Revisionists, see testimonies of Dr. Lajos Gottesmann, "Center" H3C60; Aharon Abadi, H3C15/12; Abraham Fuksz, H3C22/6; Shabtai Német, H3C72, and H3C2. See also, Baruch Confino, *Alia Beth Mihupei Bulgaria* (Illegal *Aliyah* from the Shores of Bulgaria). Jerusalem: Ahiasaf, 1965, 135p.

5. Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution.* London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1971 (1953), 668p.; Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews.* Chicago: Quadragle, 1965, 790p.; Nora Levin, *The Holocaust.* New York: Thomas Y. Crowel, 1968, 768p.

6. Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 199-221, 285-361.

7. The Labor-Service (Munkaszolgálat), as unarmed units under the command of the Hungarian army, was created in 1939. In 1942, some 50,000 men from these units were with the Second Hungarian Army at the Eastern Front. Approximately 40,000 of them did not return, many of them victims of Hungarian maltreatment.

8. Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 199-215.

9. Bela Vago, "Germany and the Jewish Policy of the Kállay Government," in *HJS,* vol. 2, pp. 182-210.

10. For the summary of the Wannsee Conference, see *Trials of War Criminals Before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals,* Case XI, NG-2586. The document was republished in several collections, with English translation, see John Mendelson, ed., *The Holocaust–in Eighteen Volumes.* New York and London: Garland, 1982, vol. 11, pp. 1-32.

11. Livia Rothkirchen, "Hungary–an Asylum for the Refugees of Europe," *Yad Vashem Studies,* Jerusalem, no. 7, 1968, pp. 127-142.

12. See testimony of Uziel Lichtenberg, "Center" H3C14/3, pp. 1-11; Korniansky, pp. 77-146; Goldfarb, pp. 26-31. On the influence of the refugees from Poland on Slovakian youth, see testimonies of Peretz Révész, "Center" H3C21/4, H3C19/3, H3C27; Eliezer (Eli) Cohen, H3C21/4; Israel Szabó (Rebe), YVSA 03/2421—all members of Maccabi Hatzair. Joseph Baumer from Hashomer Hatzair in Slovakia says in his testimony, "Center" H3C7, that "we heard of the extermination for the first time from Chaika Klinger," who came to Budapest in December 1943. Several others from that movement said that same thing, "Center" H3C22/3. It is very possible that this difference stems from different experiences of the two movements; Baumer writes negatively of members who came from Poland to Slovakia in 1943; see letter in "Moreshet" D.I.1956.

13. There was no possibility of any legal *aliyah* from Slovakia since the British government did not recognize "independent" Slovakia, and no immigration certificates could be sent there. These were sent to the Palestine Office in Budapest. When the *tiyul* to Hungary began, there was no legal *aliyah* from there either, only a hope for it. The alternatives of *tiyul* or living in Slovakia with Aryan papers show up in many letters in 1942-1943, see "Istanbul" Sl 7, 15, 28, 30, 81, and H33.

14. On various aspects of the *tiyul,* see testimony of Bnai Akiva members from Slovakia, "Center" H3C22/7; on Maccabi Hatzair, see Eliezer Cohen, Joseph Sheffer, H3C3; Ora and Shlomo Wetzler, H3C19/6; on Hashomer Hatzair, see Joseph Baumer, who was sent to Hungary with Yitshak (Mimish) Herbst, in order to prepare the *tiyul* of this movement; on Betar, see Zehava Arieli H3C68 and H3C2; on the members from Poland, see Uziel Lichtenberg, Dr. Moshe Preminger, H3C4/14 and Goldfarb, pp. 6-14.

15. On the arrests, see testimony of Joseph Golan, "Center" H3C21/3 and H3C22/8. A year later, Szilágyi, the adult leader of Hashomer Hatzair, writes that it was his movement only that dealt with the *tiyul,* "Istanbul" H24, but this is certainly inaccurate. Simha Hunwald was the secretary and the leader of the young generation of this movement. After his arrest in 1942, he was sent to labor service, but returned in 1944. He was killed by the Arrow Cross in January 1945; see Chapter 14.

16. See letter by Gisi Fleischmann in Rothkirchen, p. 124. See also the testimonies of Révész, and Moshe Alpan, "Moreshet" A.710.

17. "Istanbul" H32. Though the correspondence with Istanbul began

nearly a year after the first refugees came from Slovakia, we learn a great deal about their life from these letters; see especially: H30, 32, 33, 47. See also, Alex Weissberg, *Advocate for the Dead, The Story of Joel Brand.* London: Andre Deutsch, 1958, pp. 30-52.

18. Testimonies of Victor Reshef (Fischer), "Center" H3C20; Révész, Baumer, David Gur, Benshalom, pp. 176-179 and "Center" H3C59.7.

19. Testimonies of Lichtenberg, pp. 23-33, Révész, Preminger; Alpan, "Center" H3C59.3 and Benshalom, p. 23.

20. See Note 15. The refugees found a relative security in the camps in Budapest, except the one on Rumbach Street where the Hungarians collected those to be deported to Slovakia. This one was also difficult to escape from. See testimony of Lichtenberg, pp. 40-72; Korniansky, pp. 161-163.

21. *OMZsA évkönyv, 1943-44,* pp. 202-220.

22. In several interviews, Moshe Krausz, in Jerusalem, confirmed the main points of this description, and I express my gratitude for his assistance. He even said that an agreement was signed by Simha Hunwald and Meir Kahani, for cooperation between the two movements. Both were no longer alive at the time of the research. See testimonies of Siegfried (Stephen) Roth, "Center" H3C29; Révész, Baumer, Lichtenberg, p. 14; leaders of Bnai Akiva, H3C21/2 and H3C22/7; Benshalom, pp. 33-37. Many letters sent to Istanbul deal with this problem, the most important being H 1-7, 24, 32, 35, 47, 93, 151. See also the correspondence of the Palestine Office in Istanbul, Central Zionist Archive (hereafter—CZA) L15/251.

23. Weissberg, pp. 3-22; André Biss, *Un million de Juifs à sauver,* Paris: Grasset, 1967, pp. 46-48. See also testimony of Hansi Brand, "Center" H3C23.

24. Kasztner, pp. 31-56; Weissberg, pp. 22-30; Lévai, *Szürke könyv,* pp. 141, 147; Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 932-976.

25. Moshe Schweiger (Bar-Zvi) was highly esteemed by all the movements. See Benshalom, pp. 36-37; Schweiger on himself, "Istanbul" H9.

26. In March 1944, Kasztner writes a detailed report on the Committee's activity and mentions Samu Stern and some Orthodox leaders as those who helped the Committee financially, "Istanbul" H255. See also Rothkirchen, p. 127. In his report in 1945 he writes that Stern refused to help, Kasztner, p. 39.

Notes to Chapter 3

1. Mario D. Fenyo, *Hitler, Horthy and Hungary.* New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1972, pp. 57-147; György Ránki, *1944 március 19* (March 19, 1944), 2nd. ed., Budapest: Kossuth, 1978, pp. 7-124. In January 1942, an obscure project to deport "alien Jews" from Hungary, which meant those of Carpatho-Ruthenia, was brought up by Hungarian sources, apparently not by the government. See Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 274-282. The plan failed, also because Eichmann was unwilling for a "partial solution" of the Jewish Question in this country. See Braham, *The Destruction of Hungarian Jewry,* pp. 87-88, and doc. 70, pp. 135-142, doc. 86, pp. 175-182, doc. 91, pp. 195-198.

2. "Istanbul" H326-361, 375-379. These were the first letters to Hungarian addresses, dated from December 6th, 1942, to April 10th, 1943.

3. "Istanbul" H32, 33, 94, 143; testimonies of Baumer, Dov Weiss, "Center" H3C22/7. A "Census of Refugees" was conducted by the movements in order to fix the distribution of financial help. The data of this census were not found. The total given, near to a thousand, is unreliable because of frauds practiced by all the movements. Leo Rosenthal writes from Bratislava in April 1943, of 140 refugees in Hungary, "Istanbul" S1 35. In June Koriansky writes of 200, S1 65.

4. Ex-Prime Minister Kállay speaks of unacceptably high figures, see Nicholas Kállay, *Hungarian Premier.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1954, p. 35. For a more realistic estimate, see Kasztner, p. 45. In a letter from Budapest, in October 1943, the estimate is 7,000-10,000 refugees from Slovakia, "Istanbul" H73.

5. See letters from Budapest, "Istanbul" H336-345, 353, 356, 359-361, 375-379.

6. "Istanbul" H7; Weissberg, pp. 37-41. The envoy was Dr. Sedlacek a member of the staff of the *Abwehr* in Budapest, headed by Dr. Schmidt. Many letters deal with this subject, the most important being "Istanbul" H38, 42, 60, 69, 72, 98, 108, 119-122, 125-152. Important original documents are in Peretz Révész's personal archives, deposited in "Center" H3C24, H3C27.

7. See instructions to this effect, "Istanbul" H398, 408, 433 and reports from Budapest, H66, 73, 83, 93, 216, 220. Some of the letters are from refugees who left Poland in 1943.

8. Testimony of Yitzhak Knoll, "Center" H3C14/15 and Révész's archive, H3C27. See also Kasztner, p. 43.

9. On Schindler's visit, see "Istanbul" H56, 131; on the help to Theresienstadt, Th233, 234; see also Weissberg, p. 40; Kasztner, pp. 52-53.

10. "Istanbul" H58, 138, 159; Korniansky, p. 187; testimony of Springmann.

11. See Notes 6-10 above, some original receipts and financial reports in Révész's archive. See letters "Istanbul" H14, 32, 35, 51, 96, 98 and testimony of Lichtenberg, p. 16, Jacob Liebermensch, "Center" H3C19/1 and Joseph Baumer, who was also kind enough to let me have a copy of his report, dated April 7, 1944, for which I am grateful.

12. "Istanbul" H23, 33, 42, 43, 53, 60.

13. Ibid., H20, 66, 69, 72, 82, 90, 108, 130, 186, 251, 258, 433; Bader, pp. 69-74.

14. "Istanbul" Sl204, 223, 264; the Zionist leaders' letter, CZA S26/1190; testimony of Springmann.

15. See instruction of "Istanbul" H384, 385, and responses from Budapest, H42, 51, 72, 107. From Istanbul Venya Pomeranz even threatened the activists in Budapest that financial aid would be halted if no acceptable committee were set up; confirmed in his letter to the author, adjoined to his testimony, "Center" H3C34. The money from Istanbul was sent in Western currency or in gold. See testimonies of Jenő Fränkel, "Center" H3C35. Dov Weiss, Baumer, Stephen (Siegfried) Roth, H3C29 Springmann.

16. Testimonies of Zvi Zimmerman, "Center" H3C21/6, Jacob Rosenberg H3C14/1, p. 6-8, Liebermentsch. See also "Istanbul" H163, S1 100, 111, 125. On January 5, Gisi Fleischmann writes from Bratislava that no more refugees came from Poland, S1 154.

17. "Istanbul" H134; testimony of Ruth Bayuk, Massau Archive, Tel-Yitzhak, Israel (hereafter—"Massau") and "Center" H3C14/6; Tushia Herzberg (Gutmann), YVSA 1380/103 and "Center" H3C14/10, Manus Diamant H3C15/10; Carol Tuchschneider H3C14/14, Jacob Rosenberg, Oskar Carmili (Krasnianski) H3C15/14. See also Korniansky, pp. 79-80; Fredka Mazia, *Reim Besaar* (Friends in Tempest). Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1964, pp. 250-271.

18. Testimony of Tushia Herzberg, "Center" H3C14/6, pp. 4-7.

19. Mazia, pp. 270-271. Brand and Kasztner write that the refugees

look "apathetic and detached from reality." On arrival of refugees in Budapest see "Istanbul" H53, 108, 119-121, 126. Many other letters also mention this. See also Weissberg, pp. 30-37; Benshalom, pp. 29-30.

20. Testimonies of David (Coca) Grünwald, YVSA 1350/99 and "Center" H3C14/18; Sara Cochavi H3C12, Dr. Preminger, Lichtenberg, pp. 76-79, the collective testimony of the Będzin-Sosnowiec group H3C65.

21. Testimony of Agmon and Alpan, ibid., H3C22/3. See also Baumer, Chapter 2, Note 12.

22. Eli Sajo's letter, "Istanbul" H116; the second letter, H186, is signed by Brand, Révész and Knoll.

23. Nomination of Schweiger as head of the defense committee, "Istanbul" H497, 524; receipt for the money for this purpose, H251. Schweiger's letter asking for support for educational purposes after the war, H184, and positive responses, H502, 504, both from February 1944.

24. The new situation was created at the end of 1943 when Great Britain released a number of certificates so as not to appear to be hindering rescue. Shertok in a telegram dated September 7, 1943 announces 30,000 certificates for the Balkans, CZA S25/1190. From Istanbul Barlas writes already in June, that he has 2,000 certificates, CZA L15/261. Pomeranz writes that there are enough certificates, "Istanbul" H414, but he cannot get the necessary transit visas through Bulgaria. Another insoluble problem was that Turkey permitted only nine transit visas per week and the British made no effort to overcome this. See also Ira A. Hirschmann, *Life Line to a Promised Land.* New York: Vanguard, 1946, pp. 40-43.

25. "Istanbul" H212. Lévai writes about Kasztner that he "directed the Hungarian branch of the 'Relief and Rescue Committee'. . . never established a committee and dealt with the money by himself." *Fekete könyv,* p. 141. This description is of course false, but it shows clearly that the committee in Budapest seemed totally dependent on Istanbul. Braham writes in a similar way, "The Budapest branch of the Relief and Rescue Committee—The *Vaada*—was established in January, 1943." *Politics of Genocide,* p. 932.

Notes to Chapter 4

1. On the occupation of Hungary, see Ránki, pp. 95-185, 238-275; Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 362-505.

2. See Ilona Benoschofsky, Elek Karsai, eds., *Vádirat a nácizmus ellen* (Indictment of Nazism). Budapest: Magyar Izraeliták Országos Képvitelete, 1958, 1960, 1967, (hereafter—*Vádirat*), vol. I, p. 50. At the same government meeting several anti-Jewish decrees were enacted, such as the obligation to wear the Yellow Star.

3. Ránki, pp. 159-160, 255-256.

4. Ernő Munkácsi, *Hogyan történt?* (How Did it Happen?). Budapest: Renaissance, 1947, pp. 10-15.

5. "Istanbul" H264, from March 16, 1944. The letter is signed by Brand, Kasztner, Danzig and Schweiger. The information originated with Dr. Schmidt, the Chief of the *Abwehr* in Budapest. Two days later Schmidt informed them of the coming occupation; see Weissberg, pp. 65-66 and testimony of Révész.

6. On the so-called Hungarian Gestapo headed by Péter Hain and his deputy, László Koltay, see Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 406-407.

Notes to Chapter 5

1. On Hashomer Hatzair, see Benshalom, pp. 38-48, and testimony of Agmon, one of the leaders of this movement, "Center" H3C22/3; on Dror-Habonim, *15 év* (15 Years). Budapest: ed. by Dror-Habonim, 1946, pp. 42-55, Goldfarb, pp. 35-36; on Hanoar Hatzioni, testimony of members "Center" H3C14/19, Stephen Roth, Dov Boshi (Borsodi), H3C45, Grünwald; on Bnai Akiva, members, H3C21/2.3; on Betar, Abadi, Arieli, Gottesmann, Német.

2. On the membership of the various movements in March 1944, see Benshalom, pp. 41, 167; CZA S25/7839. See also estimates in previous chapters and sources in Note 1 in this chapter. The estimate of 300-500 members seems to be the maximum at this time. To this figure must be added others who were in contact with or had been helped by the Halutz Resistance but were not full participants.

3. Testimony of Alpan, "Moreshet" A.710; Bnai Akiva, "Center" H3C21/2.1; Hanoar Hatzioni, H3C67; Goldfarb, p. 48.

4. The first letter to Istanbul after the occupation is signed by Benshalom and Révész, dated May 19th, two days after the departure of Brand, "Istanbul" H267. The connection between Bratislava and Istanbul was also greatly disturbed, since the envoys of Springmann were used

here too; see S1 303, 306-7. On May 29th, they write from Bratislava that "a few members came back from Hungary," S1 173, with no precise figure or even hint of the number of those who returned by the *re-tiyul.*

5. Benshalom, pp. 42-43. Some of the first blank forms were supplied by Brand's friends; see documents attached to Hansi Brand's testimony. On the Polish group's activity, see testimony of Tushia Herzberg, pp. 12-13 and collective testimony of the group, "Center" H3C65. This laboratory continued its activity until December 1944.

6. Testimony of Gur, in Benshalom, pp. 181-183; Reshef, p. 12.

7. On movement members in the labor service, see testimonies of Arányi, YVSA 3040/224-A; Joseph Sheffer, "Center" H3C3; Broshi, Willy Eisikovits, in Goldfarb, pp. 45-48, and one of the girl members who kept in contact with those in service, Hedva Szántó, YVSA 3071/105-S.

8. Testimony of Alpan, Révész, Knoll, Yehuda Levi (Pici), "Center" HEC14/11, "leaders' group," H3C59.6; Goldfarb, p. 50; Benshalom, p. 86.

9. Testimony of Mordecai Weisz, "Center" H3C19/9, pp. 4-5, Grünwald, p. 12, Broshi.

10. Testimony of Braha Fuksz (Billitzer), "Center" H3C22/2, pp. 3-4.

11. Testimony of Mordecai Weisz.

12. Testimony of Zehava Arieli, wife of the late Andi Freiman; a slightly different version in Német's testimony, to the effect that it was a young engineer who gave the place to Betar. Német says that the same person also gave them "papers" and official stamps for creating documents.

13. Testimony of Bnai Akiva members, "Center" H3C21/2.1.

14. This department is mentioned in many testimonies with great factual variations. See Gottesmann, Hashomer Hatzair members "Center" H3C22/3, "leaders' group," H3C59.1; Munkácsi, p. 119.

15. Testimony of Yehuda Levi, pp. 3-4; Hannah Ganz, pp. 2-8.

16. Testimony of Agmon, in Benshalom, pp. 162-163.

17. Testimony of Moshe Weisskopf, "Center" H3C15/13.

18. Testimony of Grünwald, p. 3.

19. Testimony of Arányi, p. 7.

20. As mentioned, Agmon was in Munkács and arrived in Budapest on April 15th, his testimony, in Benshalom, pp. 163-166.

21. Testimony of Broshi.

22. Goldfarb, p. 48. His wife, Neshka, mentions the same two towns,

in *15 év,* p. 53. Joseph Gárdos, one of the leaders of Dror in Hungary and one of the organizers of the *tiyul,* died in 1946. See his brother's testimony, Dr. Mihael Gárdos, "Center" H3C66.

23. Testimony of Hannah Ganz, also a letter of Izbitzky attached to Hansi Brand's testimony.

24. "Istanbul" H267.

Notes to Chapter 6

1. In 1943 there was no *aliyah* whatsoever from Romania. In 1944 the first ship left in June, see CZA L15/2701. On the activity on the Romanian side, see testimony of the group in Arad, "Center" H3C15/1 and Aryeh Eldar (Hirsch), R3C7. On the tentative plan to bring people from Hungary, the sole source is Eldar's testimony. In the correspondence with Istanbul the *tiyul* to Romania is first mentioned in a letter to Budapest dated March 31, 1944, "Istanbul" H5248.

2. First testimony of Israel Harari (Hochheiser) on his arrival at Haifa on May 5, 1944; a later and detailed testimony, "Center" HC44.

3. "Istanbul" H267, 303.

4. Testimony of Aviva Weinbach (Karni), "Center" H3C16, pp. 11-12. On her passage in Turda, see testimony of Eldar and his letter that contains first information on the *tiyul,* "Ghetto Fighers" 3084. On arrival at Haifa a short evidence was taken from her and from Shimon Israeli, see CZA S25/7839.

5. On the *tiyul* in Kolozsvár, see testimonies of Jacob Gutfried, "Center" H3C46, Baruch Robinson H3C16/3, and in collective testimony, H3C16.

6. See testimonies of Ruth Bayuk, Tushia Herzberg and collective testimony, "Center" H3C65.

7. In various testimonies the committee is mentioned with slightly different composition, see Note 23 in Chapter 3. See also Benshalom, pp. 45, 54, 82-85; testimony of "leaders' group," "Center" H3C59.3, pp. 11-12. One of the leaders of Betar writes in a detailed letter in August 1944, that the relations with other movements were good, CZA L15/282.

8. Testimony of Alpan.

9. The activities of the Relief and Rescue Committee were not yet the subject of scientific research. See Kasztner, pp. 134-165; Benshalom,

pp. 80-95; Biss, pp. 62-118; see also testimony of Hansi Brand, Révész, Mordecai Weisz, Alexander Barzel, "Center" H3C8, H3D16, "leaders' group," H3C59.1. For the most detailed research, see Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 932-976.

10. Kasztner, p. 72.

11. Ibid., p. 82.

12. Testimony of Arányi and collective testimony, "Center" H3C16, pp. 14-16, Eli Shalev (Shlomovits), YVSA 3073/270-S.

13. Hannah Ganz in her testimony made it clear that she was warned by the Jewish Council of Kolozsvár to stop spreading horror stories. YVSA 3039/224-G, "Center" H3C16. Baruch Robinson in his testimony states that even the Zionist members of the Jewish Council refused to help in the *tiyul.* Jacob Gutfried agrees on the facts, and explains that after the nomination of the Council they preferred not to be involved in illegal activities. See also the recollections of Chief Rabbi Weinberger, who was taken to Romania by Hannah Ganz: Moseh Carmilly-Weinberger, ed., *A koloszvári zsidóság emékkönyve* (Memorial Volume for the Jews of Cluj-Kolozsvár). New York: The Author, 1970, pp. 226-230. See also Yehuda Levi's testimony.

14. Testimony of Manus Diamant, Carol Tuchschneider, Pinek Treimann, Sofia Nünz (Kav-Venaki) YVSA S25/7839. Alexander Leitner, the head of the Jewish Council in Nagyvárad, writes about the refugees from Poland who organized the passage to Romania, CZA S25/1469, p. 119. Benshalom writes that the members from Poland led all the *tiyulim* at this time in the towns bordering on Romania, pp. 58-59.

15. Testimony of Yehuda Levi. On June 24, Benshalom writes to Istanbul that Hanoar Hatzioni has succeeded in transferring its people to Romania with no casualties. Members of Dror-Habonim and Maccabi Hatzair write of about 20 of their members who have already been arrested, including Eli Sajo, Menahem Klein and Hannah Ganz. The estimate is that about 400 members had already passed into Romania, "Ghetto Fighters" 3084.

16. Testimony of Alpan, in Benshalom, pp. 59-73.

17. Testimony of Dan Zimmerman, "Center" H3C15/1, pp. 1-3 and CZA S25/7839.

18. See Note 16 above.

19. Testimony of Professor Menahem Zvi Kadari, in "Center" H3C15/1, pp. 4-10.

20. Testimony of Jenő Dijósi, YVSA 2347/69-D.

21. See Note 1 in this chapter, testimony of Mordecai Rössel, "Center" H3C15/1, pp. 12-13, Dr. Joseph Schönfeld, H3C29. For detailed information on the rescue activities in Turda, see Arnold David Finkelstein, *Fénysugár a borzalmak éjszakájában* (Beam of Light in the Night of Horrors). Tel Aviv: P. Solar and J. Nadiv, 1958, 400p.

22. It appears that there was a census of refugees in Arad but no written document survives; see testimony "Center" H3C15/1, p. 24. Finkelstein in Turda estimates (p. 291) that 1200-1500 refugees passed through that town, two-thirds originally from Transylvania.

23. On Brand's mission see Weissberg, op. cit., and Brand's testimony in CZA 526/1190. For more detailed information and sources, see Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 941-951.

24. Kasztner, pp. 130-131.

25. Ibid., p. 119. Numerous testimonies mention this transport, in part no doubt because of its great impression on Israeli public opinion. Important personal documents are collected in Professor Alexander Barzel's personal archives, "Center" H3C8, H3C11, H3d16. See also Note 9 above.

26. See collective testimony, "Center" H3C65, Carol Tuchschneider, p. 14.

27. Conflicting evidence makes it difficult to arrive at any precise number of the members of the various youth movements. Sometimes there was also a lack of precision in distinguishing between members of the movements and adult members of the Zionist parties. At any rate, the list drawn up at Bergen-Belsen, which included only those who remained there after the first group left for Switzerland, shows the following breakdown:

	Number of Members
Maccabi Hatzair	31
Dror	23
Habonim	10
Ihud from Kolozsvár	23
Hashomer Hatzair	72
Hehalutz-Hamizrahi (Bnai Akiva)	43
Hanoar Hatzioni	17
Betar	17
Total, all Halutz movements	236

In the minutes of a meeting of the Hungarian Zionist Executive which took place at Bergen-Belsen, it was recorded that there were only 175 members in the Halutz movements. Either this was an error, or there was a different definition of what was meant by "Halutz youth movements". Some documents pertaining to the Bergen-Belsen group, received from Eliezer Cohen, are attached to his testimony, "Center" H3C21/4. Other important documents can be found in Professor Alexander Barzel's papers, (see Note 25). The minutes were given to me by Lajos Gottesmann, H3C60.

Notes to Chapter 7

1. Testimonies of Tuchschneider, Ruth Bayuk.
2. On the activities of the Polish group, see testimony of Tushia Herzberg, Manus Diamant, Jacob Rosenberg, pp. 9-12.
3. On the bunker in Rózsadomb, see Chapter 5.
4. Oslander and Friedmann were of the newly elected leadership of Bnai Akiva. The third, and senior member was Kupperstein who was engaged in the Labor Service. Bnai Akiva was one of the movements which suffered most from leadership problems. The activists of other movements write to Istanbul that Bnai Akiva and Hanoar Hatzioni remained with no leadership; see "Istanbul" H297, 303.
5. Benshalom, pp. 65-66, 74-77. On the same topic, Benshalom writes to Geneva, "Ghetto Fighters" 3084. Several attempts for a *tiyul* through Szeged are known. On that of Leon Blatt from Hanoar Hatzioni, see CZA S25/7839.
6. Testimony of Tushia Herzberg, pp. 16-18. On the deportation from Topolya, see Braham, *The Destruction of Hungarian Jewry,* Doc. 105, p. 363.
7. Testimony of Révész, Ferenc Pártos, YVSA 1186/116-P; Benshalom, pp. 86-88.
8. Testimony of Hannah Ganz, YVSA.
9. Testimony of Alexander Grossman, "Center" H3C1. The arrest of this group caused a serious setback to the organization of the *tiyul,* since the local contact, Tamarka Benshalom, had to be shipped back to Budapest, Benshalom, pp. 67-68.
10. Joel Palgi, *Ruah Gedola Baa* (A Great Wind Came). Tel-Aviv: Am

Oved, 1977, 251 p. Benshalom, pp. 128-132; Kasztner, pp. 142-146. Important information is found in two meetings of the "leaders' group", "Center" H3C59.5, with the participation of several of the former parachutists. This is mentioned in numerous testimonies; for the most significant, see Hansi Brand, Tushia Herzberg.

11. See "leaders' group", ibid., pp. 11, 16-19; Palgi, pp. 17-26; Korniansky and Unger at the Kibbutz HaMeuhad Convention, see *Veida Ha 14 Shel Hakibbutz HaMeuhad* (The 14th Convention of Hakibbutz HaMeuhad), Givat Brenner, January 14-21, 1944.

12. Benshalom, p. 132; similar remarks are made in many testimonies; see also Kasztner, p. 16.

13. Palgi, pp. 102-114; Biss, pp. 194-201; Bader, p. 110; Kasztner, pp. 142-144; Yehuda Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust, The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee,* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981, p. 141. Hansi Brand, who accompanied Palgi to the SS, insists in her testimony that they believed Palgi's story, at least at the first visit.

14. Palgi, pp. 169-172; Kasztner, p. 145. Hansi Brand says in her testimony that Peretz Goldstein was free to decide and was not pressured. On July 6, Veesenmayer sends a report to Berlin stating that four (!) parachutists had been arrested. Ribbentrop shows it to Hitler who notes: "Shoot them." This instruction was transferred to Budapest. Braham, *The Destruction of Hungarian Jewry,* Docs. 287, 195, pp. 619, 445.

15. Palgi, pp. 115-154.

16. Testimony of Jenő Fränkel, Alexander Grossman, Siegfried Roth, and Edit Grosz, "Center" H3C19/17. On Roth's arrest see the report by Veesenmayer to Berlin, Braham, *The Destruction of Hungarian Jewry,* Doc. 284, p. 612. The Germans emphasized the importance of preventing the escape of Jews to Romania and in this regard activated their Minister in Bucharest; see Docs. 282, 316-319, pp. 610, 680-687.

17. Macartney, vol. 2, p. 309; Palgi, pp. 151-152; testimonies of Alexander Grossman, Stephen Roth. After Roth's arrest, Komoly contacted Miklós Mester and asked for his intervention. In the same prison at the time were Leon Blatt, arrested in Szeged, and Jacob Rosenberg's mother. Rosenberg in his testimony says that he was in contact with an SS officer who succeeded in liberating several people, and offered him a large sum of money to liberate these two and Hannah Szenes. The officer checked

the possibilities, and returned saying that even though the sum was large he could not undertake this operation.

18. Some contradictory evidence concerning preparations for this liberation, Benshalom, p. 102; testimony of Jenő Fränkel. On Ernő Pető of the Jewish Council, see Komoly's Diary, HJS, vol. 3, p. 230. The leaders of the Halutz Resistance say they were instructed by Kasztner not to interfere with the liberation of the parachutists because of political complications at high level, "Center" H3C23/3-5.

19. Testimony of Ruth Bayuk, "Massua", pp. 8-13, Manus Diamant, pp. 22-27.

20. Testimony of Tushia Herzberg, pp. 24-25.

21. Kasztner, p. 146.

Notes to Chapter 8

1 Lévai, *Fekete könyv,* pp. 164-185, Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 743-819.

2. Testimony of Dr. Alexander Nathan, YVSA 1404/37-G, p. 10. On the Protocols of Auschwitz, see Ránki, pp. 267ff.; Fenyo, pp. 194-206; Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 708-731, 1109-1112; Lévai, *Fekete könyv,* p. 152. See also testimonies of Dr. Fábián Herskovits, "Center" H3C48, Oskar Krasniansky, H3C15/14.

3. Lévai, *Szűrke könyv,* pp. 13-21.

4. Lévai, *Fehér könyv,* pp. 56-74; Important sources on Horthy's policy and Veesenmayer's telegrams and reports, in Braham, *The Destruction of Hungarian Jewry,* Docs. 183, 187, 190-194, pp. 414, 424-429, 437-444.

5. Horthy's words quoted in Ránki, p. 254; Lévai, *Fekete könyv,* p. 132.

6. Testimonies of Fábián Herskovits, Lajos Gottesmann; see also *Vádirat,* vol. 3, doc. 15, pp. 27-37; Munkácsi, pp. 116-123.

7. Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 1113-1117. Bela Vago, "The Horthy Offer – A Missed Opportunity for Rescuing Jews in 1944," in Braham, ed. *Contemporary Views on the Holocaust,* New York: Kluwe and Nijhoff, 1983, pp. 23-45.

8. Lévai, *Fekete Könyv,* pp. 186-191; Lévai, *Fehér könyv,* pp. 106-119; Munkácsi, pp. 181-194; Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 1077-1094.

9. The author was informed about the proposal to bring Bernadotte to Budapest by Mr. Moshe Krausz. Apparently from the same source, Lévai, *Fehér könyv,* pp. 167-174. On the Langlet couple, who were proclaimed "Righteous Gentiles of the Nations," by Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, YVSA M31/101, see also testimony of Révész.

10. Lévai, *Raoul Wallenberg,* Budapest: Magyar Téka, 1948, 327 p.; Anger Per, *With Wallenberg in Budapest,* (preface by Elie Wiesel), New York: Holocaust Library, 1981, 191 p.; Frederck E. Werbell, *Lost Hero; the Mystery of Raoul Wallenberg,* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982, 284p.; Elenore Lester, *Wallenberg, the Man in the Iron Web,* New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs, 1982, 183p.

11. On the controversies between Krausz's organization and the Halutz Resistance, the latter's point of view, Benshalom, pp. 96-104.

12. On George Mantello's actions, see in detail Lévai, *Zsidósors Európában* (Jewish Fate in Europe). Budapest: Magyar Téka, 1948, pp. 14-48.

13. Lévai, *Fehér könyv,* pp. 77-79.

14. On the constitution of the separate organization of Christians converted from Judaism, *Vádirat,* vol. 3, doc. 67, pp. 149-153. The figure cited from Lévai, *Fekete könyv,* p. 191, seems extremely high. See Note 30 below.

15. In August, leaders of the Halutz Resistance write that practically all the Hungarian movements were transferred to Romania. This was not far from the actual situation, if we disregard those in jail and those in the Labor Service System, "Istanbul" H289, 306.

16. A general review on the subject of false papers, "leader's group," "Center" H3C59.7; on the various movements' activities, see testimonies of Dr. Adoniyahu Billitzer (Dajnus), H3C19/7; Bnai Akiva, H3C21/2; on Betar, Meiri Bar-Levav, H3C14/15, Német.

17. Testimony of David Gur, in Benshalom, pp. 176-205.

18. Testimony of Révész, Viktor Fischer. There are some minor differences between these and the testimony of Gur concerning the work in Rózsa Street which do not alter the general picture.

19. On the Hungarian Front, see István Pintér, *Magyar Front és az ellenállás* (Hungarian Front and the Resistance). Budapest: Kossuth, 1970, 264p.

20. Ibid., pp. 108-155.

21. Testimony of Joseph Meyer, in Benshalom, pp. 149-160, on the

contacts with various groups of POW's, ibid., pp. 189-190; Palgi, pp. 208-215; Weissberg, pp. 47-51. On contacts with the Yugoslav partisans, see testimony of Joseph Löwinger, "Center" H3C86.

22. It is important to record that the dilemma of rescue or revolt continued to occupy the Resistance activists even many years later. In the testimonies recorded in the 70's, of the "leaders' group," "Center" H3-C59, large parts of the discussion were on this topic, and were strongly influenced by events in Israel in the late 40's and early 50's. See also Raphael Vago, "The Destruction of Hungarian Jewry as Reflected in the Palestine Press," *HJS,* vol. 3, pp. 291-324.

23. "Istanbul" H210, 229, 241.

24. Ibid., H173, 199.

25. Testimony of Jacob Rosenberg, pp. 18-22.

26. See Komoly's Diary for August-September; Kasztner, pp. 156-166; Statement by Ernő Pető, *HJS,* vol. 3, pp. 60-71; Vago, *Yad Vashem Studies,* vol. 8, pp. 81-105.

27. Kasztner, p. 65; Lévai, *Szürke könyv,* pp. 168-178; Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 932, 951, 976-985; Bauer, pp. 388-389.

28. On the bureau in Vadász Street see also the next Chapter. Kasztner defines his preoccupation during this period as follows:

1. The pursuit of the Bergen-Belsen group's journey;
2. Ensuring the lives of the children who remained in Budapest;
3. The liberation of the paratrooper officers who had come from Palestine, Kasztner, p. 192.

29. Komoly's Diary, *HJS,* vol. 3, pp. 162-208.

30. *Vádirat,* vol. 3, pp. 329-330. At this cabinet meeting a statement was made that 100,000 Jews "are missing in the statistics." The number of those converted was estimated at 20,000, which seems to be low. See Note 14, here.

31. Ibid., Docs. 242, 299, 301, pp. 464-465, 489, 578-580.

32. Friedrich Born, *Bericht an das Internationale Komitee vom Roten Kreuz in Genf,* Geneva 1945. See also Komoly's Diary, for the 4th, 7th, and 29th of August 1944.

33. Komoly's Diary, *HJS,* vol. 3, pp. 192-195, 234-241; on Pető's contacts with the young Horthy, ibid., p. 55. See also Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 752-753.

34. Komoly's Diary, *HJS,* vol. 3, pp. 216, 230, 247-250; see also testimony of Herskovits.

35. "Istanbul" H303, from July 31, 1944, signed by Révész, Goldfarb, and Benshalom.

36. The Kasztner-Krausz antagonism was notorious in Zionist circles and certainly did not advance the rescue activities. However, Freudiger's description seems much exaggerated: "It seems that one of the reasons which hastened the tragedy of the Hungarian Jews, and perhaps even decided it, was the antagonism prevailing between Dr. Kasztner and Krausz." "Report on Hungary: March 19, August 9, 1944," *HJS,* vol. 3, p. 131. At the same time Freudiger and several others from the Orthodox community were rescued thanks to Romanian passports received by Krausz from Ernő Marton, a fact that did not improve the above mentioned relations. See "Center" H3d7, H3h10; Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 791-792; Kasztner, p. 166; Benshalom, 100-101; testimony of Efraim Löwinger, S25/7839.

37. See correspondence, CZA L15/277, in which Krausz writes on July 17, that he has a German agreement in principle for the departure of 40,000 people. On German sources see Note 38. See also "Istanbul" H296.

38. On July 29, Vessenmayer reports that Hungarian agreement was given for emigration of 40,000 Jews (7,000 families), depending on German sanction. On August 15, a report announces the renewal of deportation fixed for August 20, and the possibility of emigration, with Eichmann's agreement, which does not necessarily contradict the deportation project. The authorities were to downplay the emigration but not object to it overtly. Should it be realized, it would be to Sweden and Switzerland, and in no case through Romania. Braham, *The Destruction of Hungarian Jewry,* Docs. 204, 208, 330, pp. 461-463, 469, 708-710.

39. Testimony of Alpan, "Center" H3C22/3.3. Members of Hashomer Hatzair were strongly encouraged in this direction, if encouragement was at all needed. The representative of this movement in Geneva writes to Hungary: "In all countries our movement has to be in the front line of those attached to the Soviet Union. Zionism has to be progressive for we have a future . . . ." "Moreshet" D.1.1147.

40. György Aczél, one of the leading personalities of the postwar Communist regime in Hungary, is often mentioned in several testimonies, mainly those of members of Hashomer Hatzair. See Komoly's Diary for November 13 and December 3. On György Non, see next Chapter.

Notes to Chapter 9

1. Ágnes Rozsnyói, *A Szálasi-puccs* (The Szálasi Coup). Budapest: Kossuth, 1962, pp. 29-75; Éva Teleki, *Nyilas uralom Magyarországon* (The Arrow Cross Rule in Hungary). Budapest: Kossuth, 1974, 330p.; Macartney, *October Fifteenth,* vol. 2.; Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 820-884.

2. "Moreshet" D.1.1148.

3. Testimony of Joseph Meyer, in Benshalom, pp. 150-151. See also Note 21 in Chapter 8.

4. Testimony of Zvi Nadivi (Reich), "Center" H3C14/13.

5. Testimonies of Meyer and Agmon, in Benshalom, pp. 152-163, 169-170. See also Benzion Adler, "Center" H3C22/4, pp. 50-54, and Goldfarb, p. 58. The other member involved in these events, Patyu, will be mentioned later.

6. On the office in Vadász Street see previous Chapter; see also testimonies of Herskovits, Eliyahu Gal-Or (Gellért), "Center" H3C47. Pál König, YVSA 1526/132-K. A detailed description of the inner organization of the office is attached to Alexander Grossman's testimony, H3C1. In print, see Mihály Salamon, *Keresztény voltam Európában* (I was a Christian in Europe). Tel Aviv: Népünk, n.d., 220p.; Teri Gács, *A mélységből kiáltunk Hozzád* (From the Depths We Are Calling You). Budapest: Tabor, 1946, 416p. The Halutz Resistance point of view, in Benshalom, pp. 96-117.

7. Komoly's Diary, *HJS,* vol. 3, pp. 219-221, 232-234.

8. Salamon, pp. 130-133.

9. According to the testimony of Gal-Or, one of the people who had worked in the office from the beginning, protective passes were distributed in restricted numbers, and with normal registration.

10. Benshalom's letter of November 27, 1944, "Moreshet" D.1.1150.

Notes to Chapter 10

1. A letter to Geneva, dated October 26, mentions that children were gathered even before October 15, but it appears that this applies only to refugee children from Poland, "Moreshet" D.1.1148. Valuable information on Children's homes can be found in Komoly's Diary, which will be cited hereafter from Hungarian sources (origin), with the corresponding

dates, and in one of the "leaders' group" reunions with participation of Hansi Brand, "Center" H3C59.6. One of the organizers, Efra Agmon, estimates the number of children at the time of liberation at 5,000. Lévai estimates the number at 6,000, but does not note his source, *Feteke könyv,* p. 242. See also Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 1056-1063. A partial list of children's homes, the names of those in charge, and the estimated number of children follows: Bácskai utca; Benczúr utca 35; Budafoki út (Péter Fischer, Rahel Zsoldos); Budakeszi út (Sajó Rosenblum-300); Család utca 58; Dob utca 90 (Miklós Kertész–800-1000); Garay utca; Hársfa utca 37; Jókai Mór utca; Király utca 34; Kisfaludy utca 9; Kövér Lajos utca; Mérleg utca; Mexikói út; Munkácsy Mihály utca 5/7 (Avraham Leibovits–800-1200); Munkácsy Mihály utca 52; Nagyfuvaros utca; Nürnberg utca; Orsó utca; Perczel Mór utca 2 (Yitshak Junger–314), Rákóczi út (Dr. Osterweil); Tamás utca 37; Teleki Pál utca 16/18 (Dr. Löffler-100?); Thököly út 83; Vilma királynő út 25/27 (Dr. Ottó Roboz-140); Veres Pálné utca; Wekerle Sándor utca (?).

2. Komoly's Diary, entry of September 7, 1944. Important sources, mainly photocopies of the correspondence of the World Jewish Congress, Geneva Office and the International Red Cross, in YVSA, 10/172.

3. The events were described to the author by Mrs. Mina Bretler. Both her husband and Dr. Osterweil were no longer alive when this research was conducted.

4. Testimony of Dr. László Antal, YVSA 3052/225-A. Komoly first mentions the address when he visited there on October 26, 1944, and this marks the beginning of the children's house. Another house that he dealt with at that period was located in Buda on Orsó Street.

5. In addition to Hansi Brand and Efra Agmon other names often mentioned in testimonies and in Komoly's Diarty are Zoltán Weiner, Rudolf Weisz, Vera Görög and Edit Erdős, all of whom filled various functions in the organizing body for rescue of the children.

6. Testimony of Lászlo Szamosi, YVSA 337/16-S. A diary and important documents in photocopy, "Center" H3h8. His activity was mainly linked with rescue actions under the protection extended by the Spanish legation to several Jewish houses and childrens' homes. This protection was of great importance especially in December 1944 and January 1945, thanks to Szamosi's courageous behavior.

7. Testimony of Jacob Hollander, "Moreshet" A.729.

8. Alpan (alias Rajec) wrote a short report on this House on December 3, and recorded that at that moment there were 510 children; see Révész's archives, "Center" H3C24. At the end of December the number was substantially increased.

9. Testimony of Yitshak Junger, YVSA 3051/67-4. See Komoly's Diary, entries: November 7, 11, 1944.

10. In Junger's testimony there is no mention of this, but it is possible that some or many of the Arrow Cross men of the 5th section were bribed; see Salamon, p. 183. On Dr. Gábor Sztehló Lévai writes that he organized some 30 houses with 50-100 children in each, *Fehér könyv,* p. 160. Since no sources are given, the data remains unverified, but it seems that most of these were among the Houses under Department A, headed by Komoly, and manned by the Halutz Resistance. See also sources in YVSA P.10/172. On the mass killings on the shores of the Danube see later entries.

11. Testimony of Yeshayahu (Sajó) Rosenblum in collective testimony, "Center" H3C14/19, pp. 32-34.

12. Testimony of Eliezer Kadmon, ibid., and YVSA 03/2416.

13. Moshe Alpan in "leaders' group," "Center" H3C59.5. Children's Homes were of Hashomer Hatzair, Dror-Habonim, Maccabi Hatzair and Hanoar Hatzioni.

14. It appears that in a few instances children were abandoned, resulting even in deaths. No accurate data on these cases could be established; see "Center" H3C59.5; Lévai, *Fekete könyv,* p. 243.

Notes to Chapter 11

1. See testimonies: "leaders' group," "Center" H3C59.1, H3C59.6; Rudolf Weisz, YVSA, 1253/83-W.

2. On the receipt of money from Budapest, see Komoly's Diary, pp. 186, 191-192, 203; "Istanbul" H217, 228, 231, 233, 245, 247; Bauer, pp. 391-398.

3. The complete original registers of Rudolf Weisz were destroyed after the war. Parts were published by Hashomer Hatzair and republished as part of Efra Agmon's testimony, Benshalom, pp. 173-174.

4. Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 844-850; Lévai, *Fekete könyv,* pp. 230-235.

5. Baránszki was declared a "Righteous Gentile of the Nations," YVSA, M31/1528; see also his personal testimony, "Center" H3h31.

6. See documents attached to testimony of Grossman. According to them, Grossman was elected Chairman of the Praesidium of the Palestine Office from October 16th. According to this source the other members were Mihály Salamon, Arthur Weiss (owner of the building), Jenő Fränkel (President of Mizrahi), and Dr. Albert Geyer (General Zionist). Mr. Salamon told the author personally, that no change whatsoever took place, and that he remained the chairman. According to him, Grossman was in charge only of the protective passes for the labor servicemen. Members of the Halutz Resistance either did not remember the issue, or supported Grossman's version. In any case, Grossman, with or without the formal nomination, had the central role in the inner organization of the house. In indirect support of this, see also sources, Note 8 below.

7. On the Ghetto of Budapest, Lévai, *A pesti gettó története* (The History of the Ghetto of Pest). Budapest: Officina, n.d., 174p. Lévai does not explain in detail the problems of food supply, but he mentions as sources, 17 Wekerle Sándor Street (the house directed by Grossman) and 1 Paulay Ede Street (the main storehouse of "Uncle Somló"). Indirectly Lévai gives additional support to the testimonies by the halutzim on this subject.

8. See testimonies of Herskovits, Gal-Or, König, Grossman; Salamon, pp. 133-148. Some, who were in the house, did not accept the "rule" of the youngsters without criticism; see Gács, pp. 266-267.

9. Testimony of Alexander Nathan, YVSA, 1404/37-G and also, Institute for Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Oral History Department, no. 1118. Nathan, a universally liked and respected member of Hanoar Hatzioni, became the Secretary of the Palestine Office in 1945. He died in Israel before this research started.

10. This mistake, which is far from being the only one, is mentioned in many recollections and testimonies; see Grossman.

11. Révész, in "leaders' group," "Center" H3C59.1. On the logistics of the bunkers, see next Chapter. Komoly's bureau moved to Munkácsi Street on November 22; see his Diary for entry for that date.

12. Testimonies of Billitzer and Grünwald, "Center" H3C14/19.

13. Gur in his testimony fixes the number of false protective passes at 120,000; Lévai writes of "more than 100,000"; Braham writes of "mass

production of protective passes," with no estimate, *Politics of Genocide,* p. 1001. On the distribution Lévai writes that a small quantity were sold, *Fehér könyv,* p. 125. Upon direct questioning it would appear that the Resistance received money from rich Jews for some of the passes, but the majority were given free of charge in Budapest as well, and in all cases for the Labor Service Battalions. On this, see also Gács, pp. 256-257.

14. Testimony of Nathan.

Notes to Chapter 12

1. *15 év,* pp. 57-59.
2. Testimony of Uri (Imre) Klein, YVSA, 1867/164-K.
3. Testimony of Shmuel Szántó, YVSA, 3070/104-S.
4. Testimony of Eli Shalev.
5. Imre Benoschofsky, ed., *Maradék zsidóság* (Remnant Jewry). Budapest: A Budai Izraeliták Évkönyve, 1947, pp. 44-45.
6. Testimony of Billitzer, Grünwald, Nadivi. Billitzer emphasizes that the fact that the bureau was given to the Resistance by Komoly proves the Resistance's dependence on Komoly's activities.
7. Description based on inquiries made by Betar members after the Liberation. See testimonies of Zehava Arieli and Német.
8. Benshalom, pp. 153-154. On relations with the Communist Resistance, see next Chapter.

Notes to Chapter 13

1. The appreciations by Lévai and Braham, cited in the introduction, refer mainly to the activities of the Resistance during this period. Lévai wrote his book very close to the events, and principally for people who knew most of the facts from their personal experiences. He had no Zionist background, and his earlier publications as writer and journalist, as well as his later attitudes had a pro-assimilationist tendency.
2. Testimony of Moshe Weisskopf.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid. See also testimony of Moshe Etam (Klein), who, as a 13-year-old child, was present at the shooting, "Center" H3C63. Komoly writes in his Diary, entry of December 2, that the shooting was between

two Hungarian fascist groups and mentions no resistance at all. He writes that he asked György Aczél to contact Dannecker of the Eichmann-Commando, but had no success.

5. Testimony of Weisskopf.

6. Ibid., on Aczél, see Note 40, Chapter 8.

7. Teleki, pp. 135-145; Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 838-843.

8. Testimony of Eliezer Kadmon (Kepes), YVSA 03/2416.

9. Gyula Kállai, *A Magyar függetlenségi mozgalom, 1939-1945* (The Hungarian Independence Movement). Budapest: Kossuth, 1955, 331p.; János Harsányi, ed., *Magyar szabadságharcosok a fasizmus ellen* (Hungarian Freedom Fighters Against Fascism). Budapest: Zrinyi, 1969, 906p.; Katalin Petrák and Ernő Vágó, eds., *Harcok, emlékek* (Fights, Memories). Budapest: Zrinyi, 1969, 428p.; István Pintér, *Magyar antifasizmus és ellenállás* (Hungarian Anti-Fascism and Resistance) Budapest: Kossuth, 1975, 488p.

10. Testimony of Gur, Benshalom, pp. 176-205 and his affidavit, "Center" H3C22/3.

11. Testimony of Harsányi, pp. 539-543. Concerning the trial of the Arrow Cross men and their testimonies, János Sólyom, László Szabó, *A zuglói nyilasper,* (The "Arrow Cross Trial" of Zugló). Budapest: Kossuth, 1967, pp. 128ff. Gidófalvi was killed by fascists in January 1945, a few days before the Liberation. Previously, he had apparently hidden at 35 Benczúr Street, one of the Children's Houses of the Halutz Resistance that was protected by his unit; see testimony of Grünwald.

12. Harsányi, pp. 532-533.

13. Ibid.

14. Pintér, *Magyar Front,* pp. 214-329.

15. Benshalom, pp. 157-168.

16. Harsányi, pp. 461-474, 530-535, 539-543.

17. Testimony of Kadmon; members of the Arrow Cross called each other "brother."

18. Harsányi, p. 652; Gábor Csillik, *Budapesten harcoltunk* (We Fought in Budapest). Budapest: Magvető, 1964, pp. 186-188.

19. Several testimonies exist on these events with slight variations on the less important details. See testimonies of Abraham Lebowits, "Center" H3d3, Moshe Hartman, YVSA 424/19-H. In print, Lévai, *Fehér könyv,*

pp. 164-166; Béla Vihar, *Sárga könyv* (Yellow Book). Budapest: Hechaluc, n.d. (1945), pp. 184-186).

20. Lévai, *A pesti gettó,* pp. 97-103; Braham, *Politics of Genocide,* pp. 850-884.

21. The text of the Swedish protest dated December 23, 1944, in Lévai, *Raoul Wallenberg,* pp. 165-166.

22. See testimonies of Kadmon and Grünwald.

23. Testimony of Kadmon.

Notes to Chapter 14

1. Teleki, pp. 151-217. Memories of survivors, see Vihar, op. cit.; Benoschofsky, *Maradek Zsidóság;* Dezső Pór, Oszkár Zsadányi, eds., *Te vagy a tanú* (You Are the Witness). Budapest: Kossuth, n.d., 482p.; Ervin Galili, ed., *Tanúk vagyunk. . . !* (We Are Witnesses). Tel Aviv: The Author, n.d., 332p.; Ödön Gáti et al., eds., *Mementó, Magyarország 1944* (Memento, Hungary 1944). Budapest: Kossuth, 1975.

2. On the arrest of the two members of Dror, see testimonies of Adler, Dijósi. The description of Neshka Goldfarb in *15 év,* pp. 69-84; also, Benshalom, pp. 136-139; Goldfarb, pp. 69-95; on the arrest of activists in Baross Street, see testimony of Hedva Szántó.

3. Testimonies of Hedva Szántó and Arányi.

4. Testimony of Shalev.

5. Goldfarb, p. 71.

6. Benshalom, pp. 136-139; Palgi, pp. 118-119.

7. The story published in Gilles Lambert, *Operation Hatzala,* New York: Bobbs-Merril, 1974, pp. 173-175; the event was certified to the author by David Assael and David Friedmann.

8. The text published in Lévai, *A pesti gettó,* pp. 94-95. The Arrow Cross threat to the very existence of the children's houses was constant, and most of the efforts by Komoly and by the neutral diplomats were directed toward preventing their transfer to the ghetto. Two temporary hospitals were in 44 Wesselényi Street and 2 Bethlen Gábor Street. These replaced the confiscated modern Jewish Hospital.

9. Salamon, pp. 193-195; Gács, pp. 315-335; Lévai, *A pesti gettó,* pp. 103-105. The Arrow Cross claimed that they were looking for those responsible for placing a bomb during a meeting of their party. In fact,

the attempt was made by Communist resisters of Jewish origin who had nothing to do with the house on Vadász Street. See Harsányi, pp. 648-652.

10. Salamon, pp. 197, 201; Gács, pp. 355-357. Professor Alexander Scheiber later became the head of the National Rabbinical Seminary in Budapest.

11. Testimonies of Nathan, YVSA, pp. 16-17 and *Contemporary Jewry,* p. 5.

12. Joseph Sheffer was Komoly's secretary and eye witness of his arrest; see his testimony, and also Benshalom, pp. 140-144.

13. Testimony of Sheffer.

14. Testimony of Grünwald.

15. Testimony of Meyer, Benshalom, pp. 159-160.

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